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*Along the Rio Dolores...*

## **Rico's Trail Blazers**

*Proud Ute Indians, Early Prospectors  
and the Beginning of Rico*

**By Russ Collman**

**PUBLIC  
DOCUMENT**

*No. 4*

**RICO** has a history that goes back beyond the establishment of the famous silver-mining town of Aspen, and one that goes back nearly as far as that of the well-known "Cloud City" of Leadville. The mines above Rico have produced over \$35 million (more like nearly \$1 billion in today's inflated dollars) in precious minerals since the first prospectors arrived—such as gold and silver—as well as more mundane metals: copper, lead, zinc and iron pyrites. However, Rico is in a far more remote region than Aspen or Leadville.

In the early years, long before the arrival of the Rio Grande Southern, there was only one principal way in and out of Rico, the poor trail over the mountains to Rockwood. And since the demise of the RGS in 1951, this is true again—with Colorado Highway 145 having the distinction today. In the past, this highway was poorly maintained, and during the winter months, snow often closed this rough route over Lizard Head Pass.

The isolation of Rico accounts for this mining camp's lack of fame and notoriety.

Rich mineral deposits were mined here as early as July of 1869. Two mining prospectors, Sheldon Shafer and Joseph Fearheiler, headed north from Santa Fe, New Mexico, during 1869. After they reached the so-called "Big Bend" of the Dolores River, these two men pushed on north and were impressed with indications of precious metals at Silver Creek. As a result of their findings, the Pioneer mining claim was established—the first one in the district—which covered parts of what are known today as the Shamrock, Smuggler and Riverside claims. These men also made a claim they called the "Nigger Baby," because of the abundance of black oxide of manganese at this site. Rico residents said that the men working underground at this mine came off their shifts looking like coal miners. This unusual designation was later given to part of the high peak northeast of Rico (Telescope Mountain). Nevertheless,

this unusual name remains a part of Rico's colorful past. (Refer to the U.S. Geological Survey map in the first part of this volume.)

Joseph Fearheiler was killed by Ute Indians in 1870, as he was traveling toward New Mexico. Several prospectors had visited the site of Rico during 1870, but no one ventured back to this early-day mining camp on the Dolores River during the following year, presumably because of Fearheiler's untimely death.

One of the men who visited Shafer's and Fearheiler's mining claim in 1870 was R. C. Darling, who had been hired to survey the boundaries of the Ute Indian reservation at this time. He located some mining claims in the area, and then he went on with his surveying work. His name was later given to Darling Ridge, a promontory of Expectation Mountain, west of Rico.

The Ute Indians considered all of the mountain country of Colorado their homeland. They had lived in this region for hundreds of years, and they rightly believed white men were trespassers. The Treaty of 1868 set aside most of Colorado west of the high mountains for their use "forever." However, "forever" lasted only a few years. Gold and silver was discovered in the Ute Reservation in the San Juan Region, and the prospectors decided that the Utes had no need for these rich mineral deposits! So, they should be forced to move elsewhere, allowing the prospectors to acquire wealth without being menaced by "ignorant savages," as they called the native Americans.

After clashes between Indians and prospectors, Felix Brunot, chairman of the so-called "Peace Commission," was sent west from Washington, D.C., to work out a treaty that would force the Utes to give up about four-million acres in the San Juans. The resulting "Brunot Treaty" of 1873 removed the Utes from the mining region in southwestern Colorado, and a new location was established for the Southern Ute Indian Agency about 1875. However, Mr. Brunot had to call on Otto Mears to intercede with Chief Ouray before the Utes would give up their land. The Utes trusted Otto, having dealt with him before, and he was able to settle things inside a Ute lodge, sitting on a buffalo robe

with the Ute leaders. Amazingly, the resulting settlement paid the Utes a mere 12 cents per acre! However, the annual payments going to the Indians were increased, and Chief Ouray was paid a salary of \$1,000 per year.

During 1872—before the new treaty went into effect—R. C. Darling led a large group of men from Santa Fe to the Rico mining camp, financed by U.S. Army officers and wealthy individuals from back East. At this time, some mining work was done on diggings that were to become the Atlantic Cable, Aztec, Phoenix and Yellow Jacket mining claims. Although not much of value was produced during the 1872 "expedition," prospecting was resumed again in the Rico mining district in 1877. And by 1878, the little mining camp became quite active, particularly after Sandy Campbell, John Glasgow and David Swickhimer and others arrived.

All of this activity resulted in the location of several valuable claims, including the Atlantic Cable, Aztec, Black Hawk, Columbia, Cross, Grand View, Major, Phoenix and Yellow Jacket mines. Then, during the spring of 1879, rich silver ore was discovered on Nigger Baby Hill, which resulted in a "rush" to the Pioneer Mining District—before the mining camp even had an official name.

Before 1879, Rico was commonly known as "Carbonate City" (or the "Carbonate Camp"), and several other names were suggested for this booming camp on the Dolores River. As a compromise, a man by the name of William Weston suggested the Spanish name "Rico." Of course, the obvious reason was the early-day prospectors expected to find rich mining lodes in this section of the San Juan Region. So... "Rico" it was by the summer of 1879.

By August of 1879, Rico had a real mining boom underway. And by August 21, 1879, the first issue of **THE DOLORES NEWS** was published—originally printed on the press of **THE SILVERTON MINER** and carried over the mountains to Rico. During the same month, the first two-story house was constructed in Rico, erected by Charles A. Mantz, the first editor of the **NEWS**.

The newspapers of Rico had considerable

influence on the town and the mining district. **THE DOLORES NEWS** was the first newspaper in Rico, established in 1879, as stated above. However, other weekly newspapers followed in the footsteps of the **NEWS**. In this volume we have chosen stories primarily from **THE RICO DEMOCRAT** and its successor, **THE RICO SUN**. These historic articles have come from the collection of Larry Pleasant of Dolores, who preserved these issues for the enjoyment of himself and others. (Successive owners renamed the Rico newspaper.)

During September of 1879, the first freight was hauled into Rico by wagons, bringing machinery and supplies for a saw-mill. This was established about three miles north of the little mining town, near the site of what later became the siding at Burns.

In January of 1880, J. F. Wannemaker surveyed Rico and platted the streets and avenues. At this time, Rico consisted of 320 acres, a mile long (north to south) and a half-mile wide, on a terrace above the Dolores River. Later in the year, a citizen's militia was organized, established primarily to protect local residents against attacks from Ute Indians. (This group became part of the Colorado National Guard at a later date.)

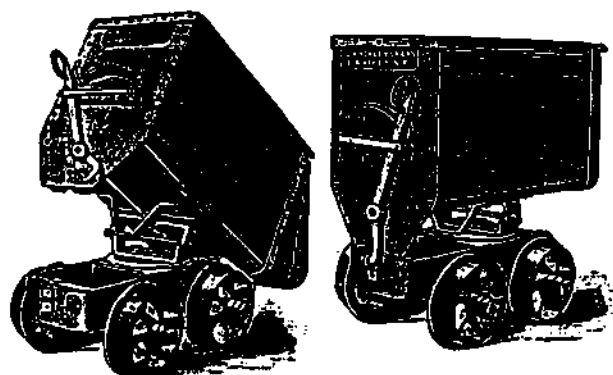
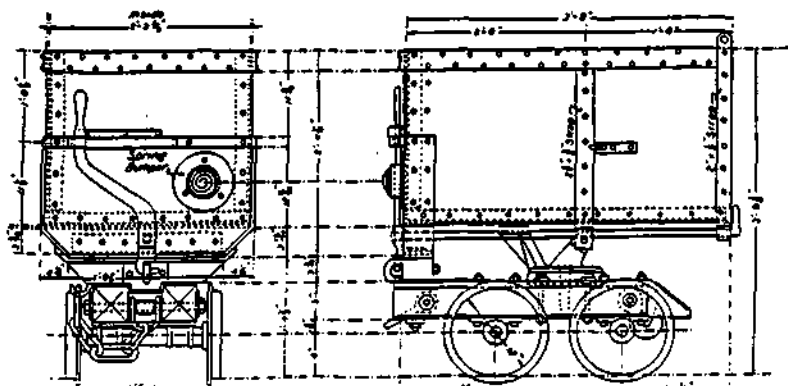
On March 13 of 1880, the first president of the Grand View Mining & Smelting Company arrived in Rico. And during April of this year, the construction of the Grand View Smelter was started. Since the Denver & Rio Grande Railway had only reached Alamosa by this time, machinery for the smelter had to be hauled by wagon over the San Juan Mountains to Pagosa Springs. From this point, the wagons traveled to Animas City (just north of what became Durango), the western terminus of the D&RG line from

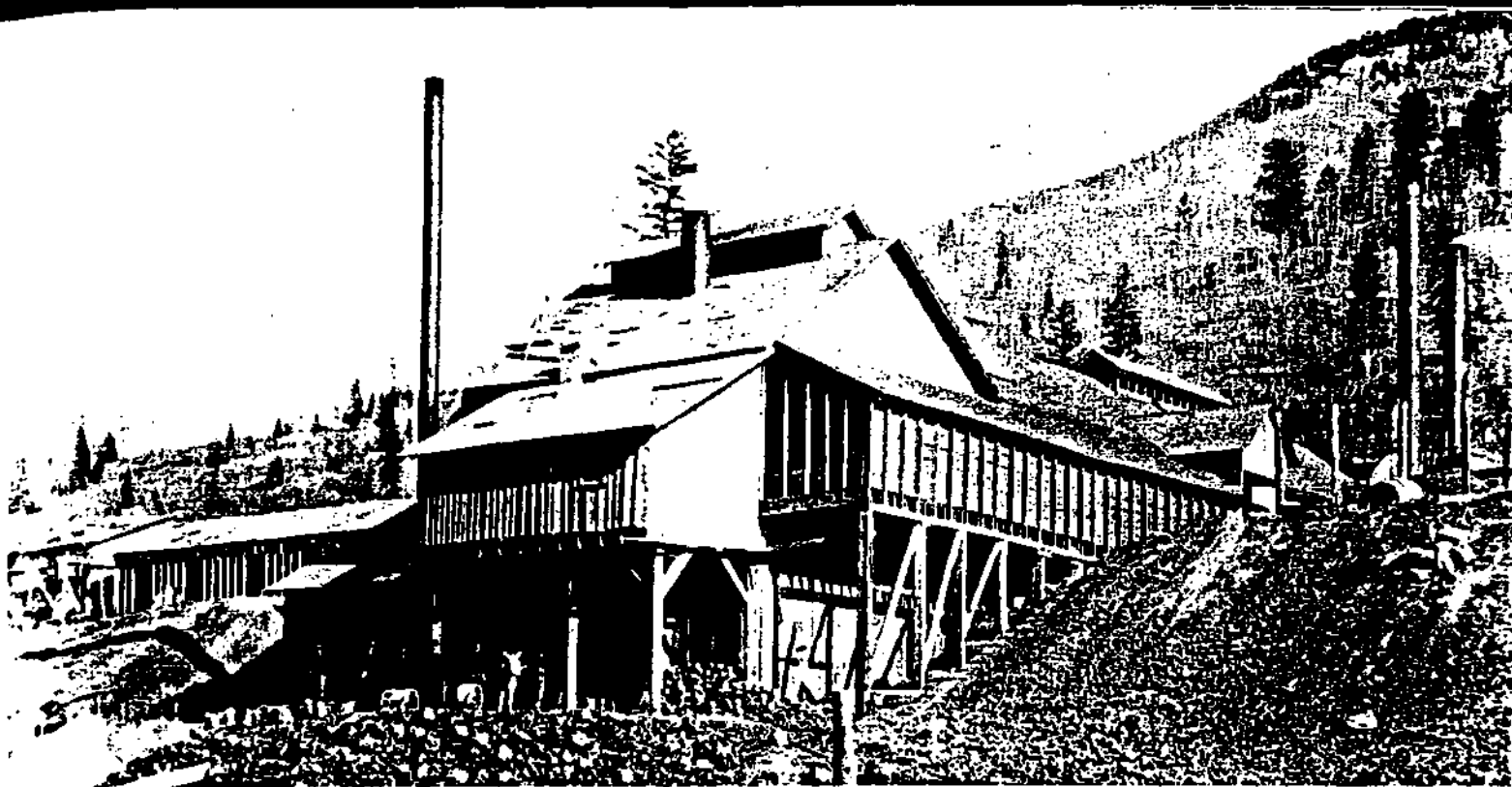
Alamosa. The freight wagons then went west to Mancos, and then more-or-less northward over what is known as Bear Creek Hill. They were then lowered by heavy ropes to the Dolores River Valley at a site about 15 miles south of Rico. Thence, the poor struggling teams hauled their loads up along what was then known as the Rio Dolores to Rico. Good weather allowed the Grand View Smelter to be "blown in" on November 7, 1880, and this facility began to produce bullion.

Until this time, the Pioneer Mining District, Rico and the surrounding area were part of Ouray County—and a trip to Ouray must have been a very rough ride to endure by horseback or in a bouncing stagecoach. However, early in 1881, the Colorado General Assembly established Dolores County, and Rico became the county seat.

The hopes of the district's miners became rather soured during the last part of the 1880's. However, during the fall of 1887, David Swickhimer struck a rich vein of ore in the Enterprise Mine on Newman Hill (part of Dolores Mountain, east of Rico). This proved to be the turning point for Rico, and several other miners resumed work at other properties in the Rico district.

The amazing story of David Swickhimer is told elsewhere in this volume. However, it should be stated here that when the Rico State Bank was opened on February 15, 1890, he was named the bank's president. Following that, the First National Bank was opened on June 16, 1890. By the time Mr. Swickhimer sold his interest in the Enterprise Group of mining properties in 1891, a large amount of ore had been piled on the mine's dump, waiting for the arrival of the long-awaited Rio Grande Southern Railroad.





CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION -  
COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

**THE PASADENA SMELTER**, the second one to be built in Rico, began operating in 1884. It was located near the final wye on the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, near the south end of town. In this scene, you are looking up the Silver Creek drainage. Captain William A. Adams was the principal owner. This was usually called the Adams Smelter in newspaper articles. The Pasadena operation was mentioned in *THE RICO DEMOCRAT* on August 21, 1891, in an article stating that J. H. Goldsworthy had secured a contract to build a wagon road to the mines on Newman Hill. This road started at a point near the Pasadena Smelter. Newman Hill was directly behind this structure. Reportedly, the Pasadena Smelter shipped 85 wagon loads of bullion during 1885.

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

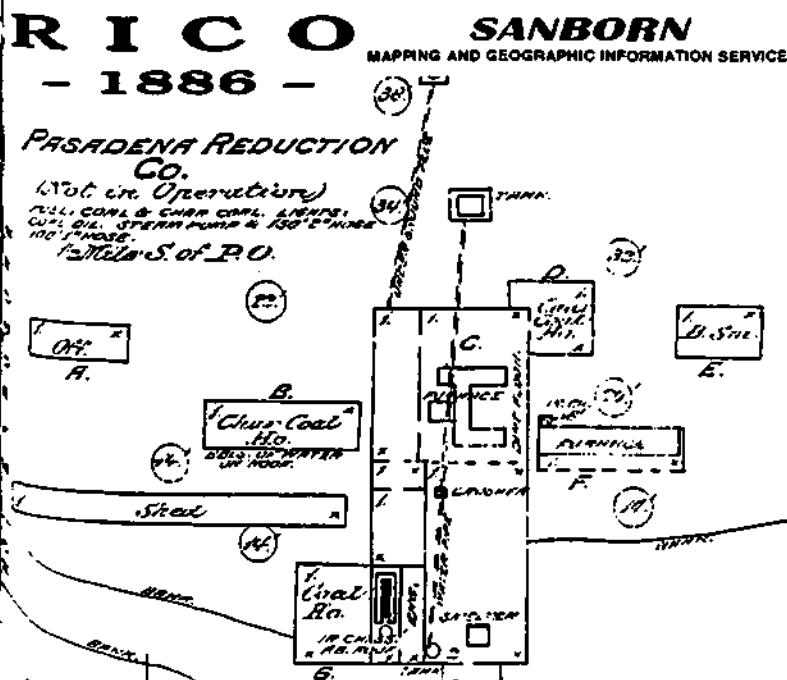
### *A Chronology of Events*

By William A. Graves

**THE HISTORY OF RICO**, Colorado, is the account of a small, remote mountain town—a mining camp—in a beautiful setting along the Dolores River, in the heart of the San Juan Region. The town has had a turbulent history of good times and bad times, so typical of many Western mining camps. However, Rico has been spared the fate of becoming just another abandoned ghost town. Just the opposite is true—Rico is a live-and-growing community in the 1990's. This chronology will identify many of the main events that occurred during Rico's existence as the principal mining town in the Pioneer Mining District, as well as its importance as the main commercial center in the northern part of the Dolores River Valley.

1776 Juan Maria de Rivera, from the Spanish territory that is now the state of New

(Continued on Page 88)

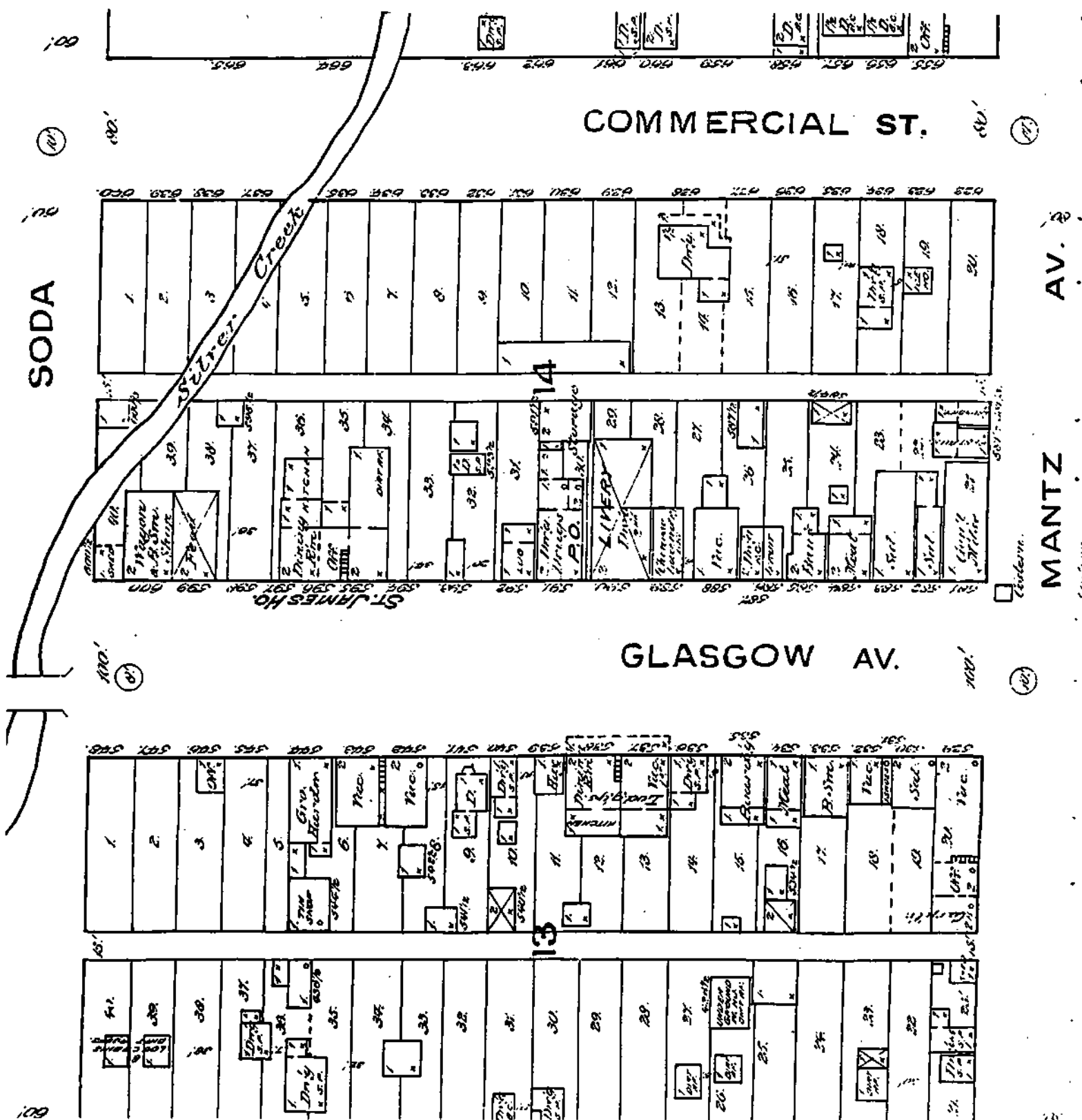


- 1886 -

**SANBORN**

## MAPPING AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SERVICE

Mexico, explored the Dolores River Valley and passed through the present-day site of Rico. Very likely, similar expeditions passed through this area from time to time; part of the vast region the royal Spanish *conquistadors* (conquerors) claimed as "New Spain."

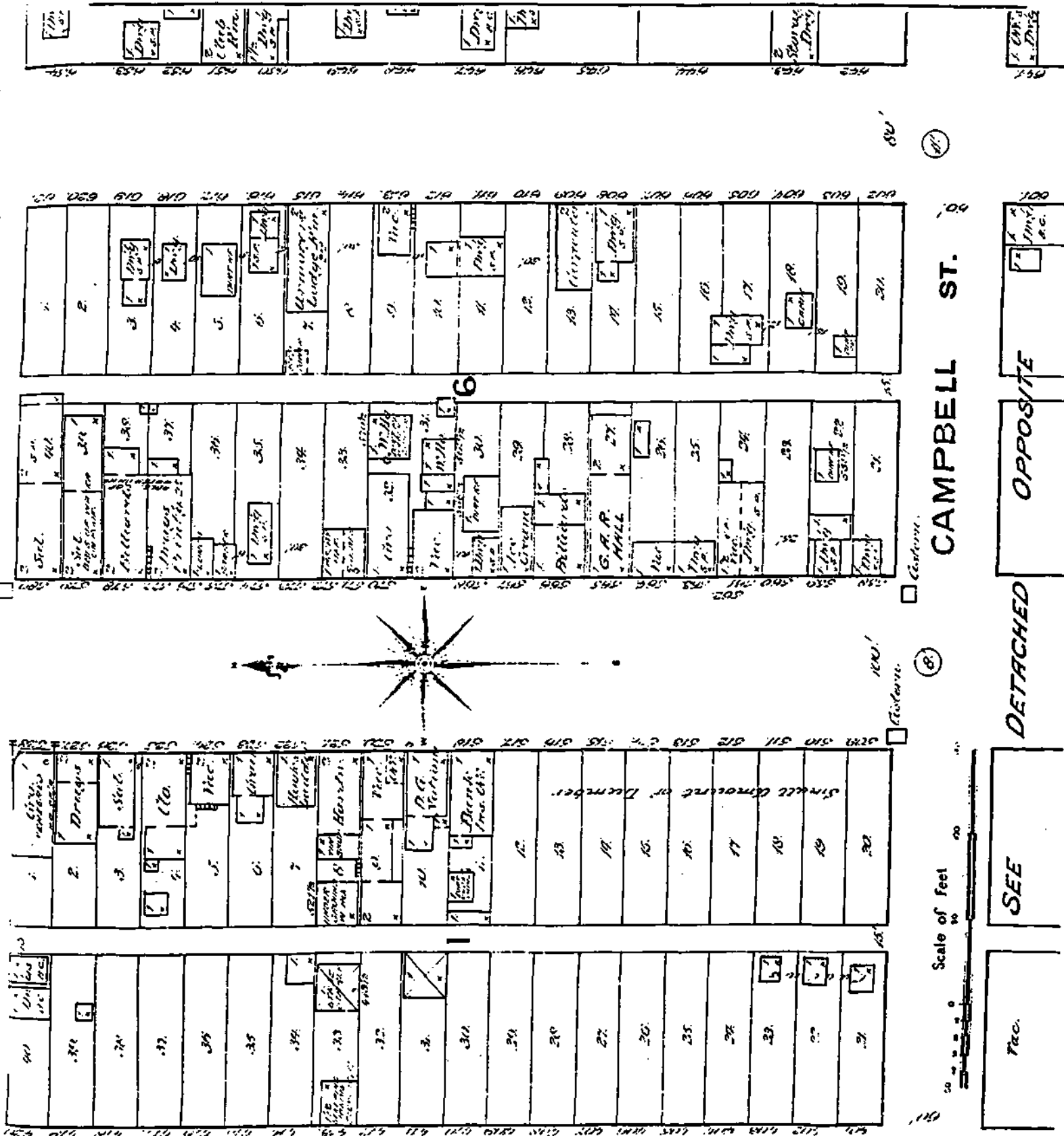


1833 Colonel William G. Walton led a party of about 60 American fur trappers from the St. Louis Fur Company into the Dolores River area, and the men spent the summer of 1833 along the river and at Trout Lake. They reported many Indians in the area, and they found the re-

mains of some old Spanish smelters.

1861 Lieutenant Howard (first name unknown) led a group of prospectors from Bakers Park (where Silverton is now located) over the mountains at Ophir Pass to prospect along the Dolores River.

1869 Mining prospects in the Rico area







from, and/or even killed white settlers and prospectors.

**1874** Professor Ferdinand V. Hayden's survey party made the first official survey of the Rico area, and Hayden named most of the nearby peaks and accepted the musical Spanish names bestowed on rivers and mountains by Spanish explorers many years earlier.

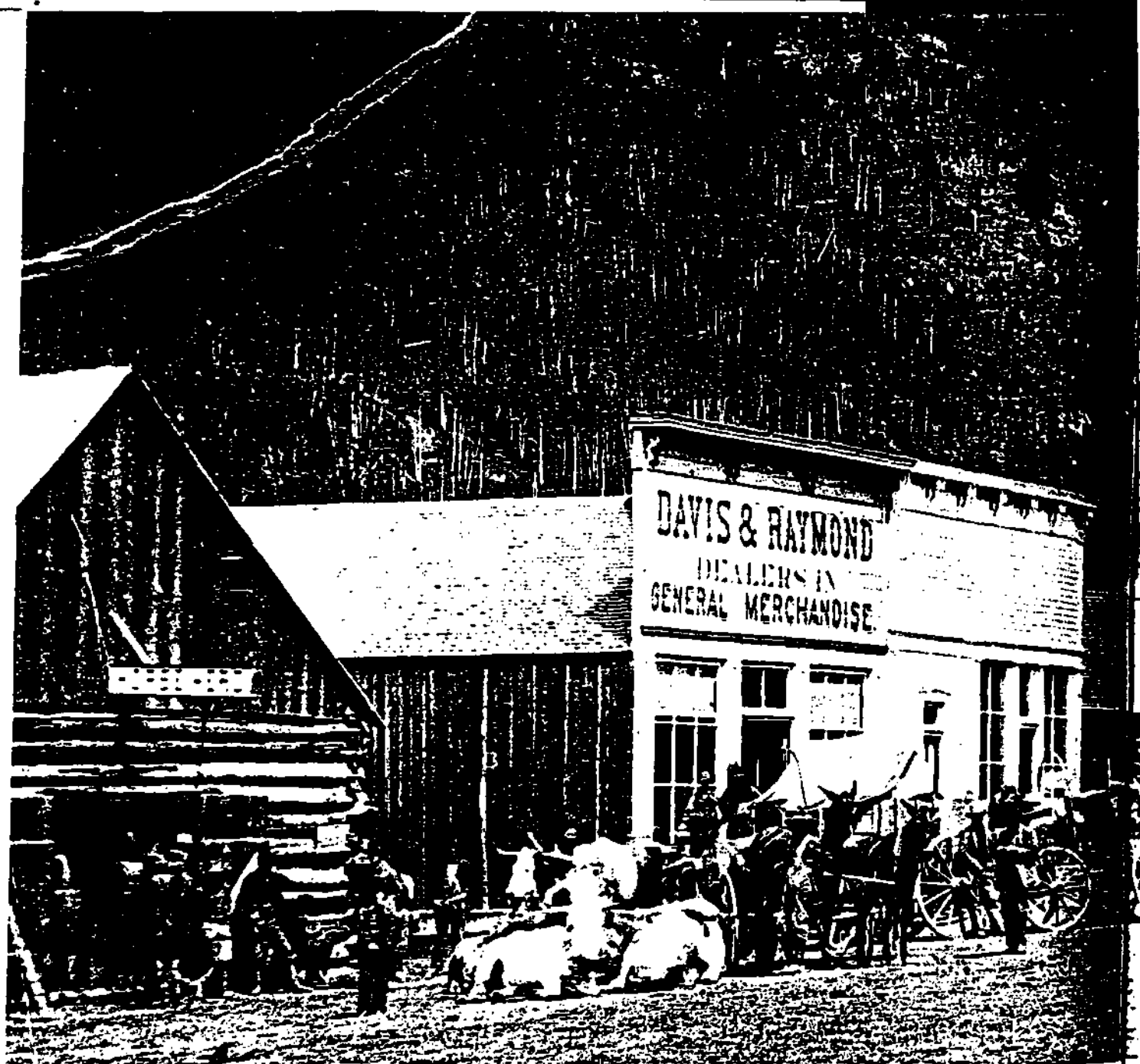
**1877** Ouray County was created on January 18, 1877, and at that time, this political subdivision was a very large county, which included the Dolores River and the Rico area.

**1877-1878** During 1877, the first significant mineral discoveries were made at Rico. Promising silver strikes were made by a prospector named Sandy Campbell, who located the Grand View lode. The news of Campbell's discoveries quickly spread, and the mad stampede was on!

Mining claims were staked for the Atlantic Cable, Aztec, Black Hawk, Columbia, Cross, Hope, Major, Pelican, Phoenix and Yellow Jacket in 1877 and 1878 by such men as Professor Hayden, John Glasgow, Charles Hummiston and David Swickhimer. These claims were located in three segments of the mining district: Nigger Baby Hill, on Telescope Mountain; Newman Hill, on Dolores Mountain; and along the stream banks of Silver Creek.

**1879** Word of the rich silver lodes on Nigger Baby Hill spread quickly during the spring of 1879. The first "outside money" needed to develop the ore bodies at Rico came to the region later that year. A group of well-known Nevada Comstock investors—which included Senator John P. Jones—bought the Grand View, Yellow Jacket and Phoenix claims from



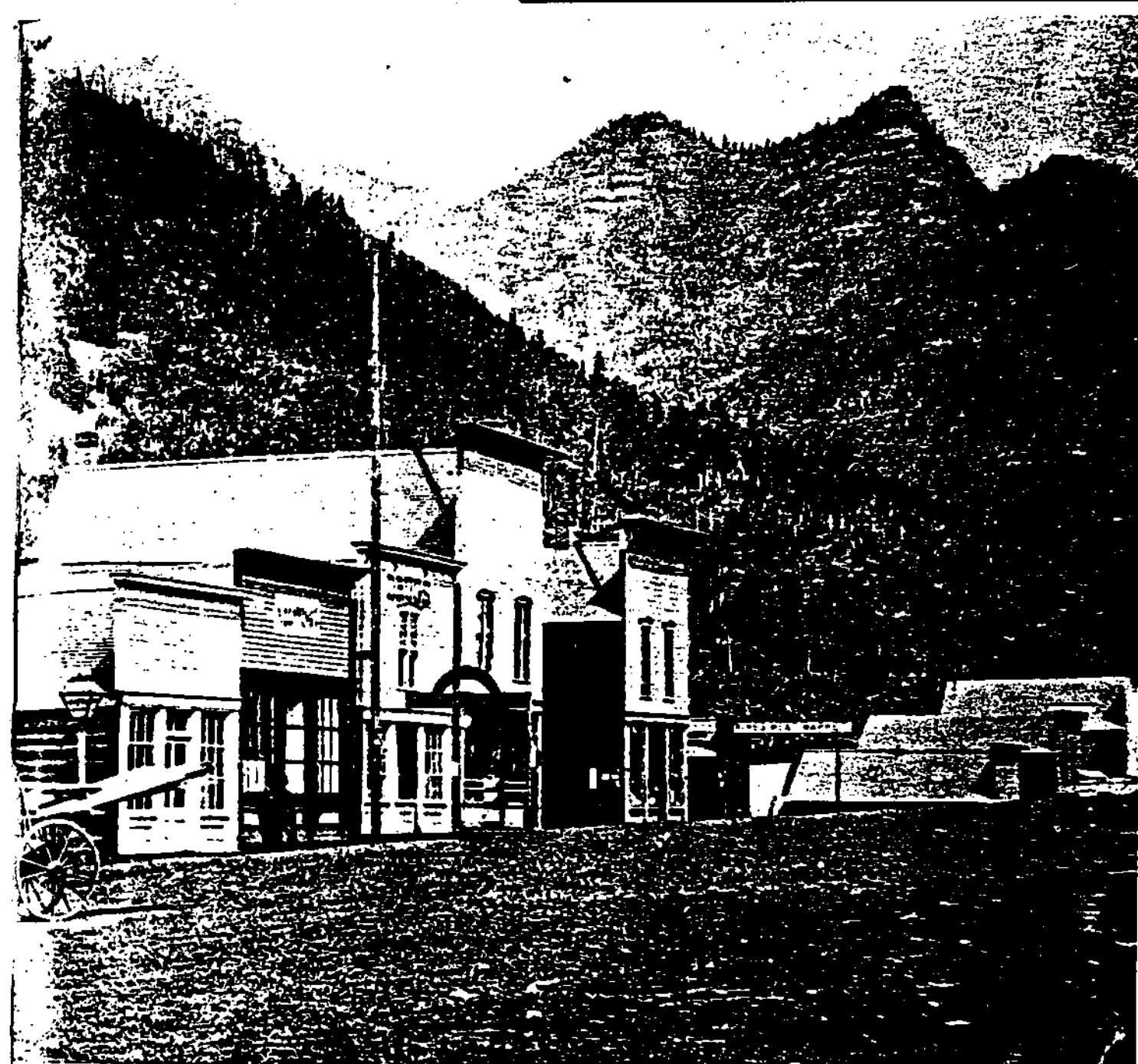


ORVAL L. JAHNKE COLLECTION

**THESE STORE FRONTS** lined Glasgow Avenue in Rico ca. 1887, facing toward the east. The log structure at the left had a projecting sign above its entrance that read "Horse Herd," which probably indicated the building housed a stable or blacksmith shop. It was located near the middle of Block 1, on the west side of Glasgow Avenue. The local boys gathered there to discuss politics, mining strikes and probably the lack of marriageable women in the community. It was a common sight to find freight wagons coming into Rico loaded with provisions to stock the merchants. The heavier-laden wagons were pulled by oxen—slow, but reliable. Mules, with ears longer than those of horses, were favored as good pulling power. Notice the large oil lamp on the boardwalk to attract attention to a shop. Sandstone Mountain is the prominent ridge on the skyline at right. A portion of Block 13 appears at the far right.

Glasgow, Campbell and Hummiston for \$60,000 (or \$124,000, depending on which report you choose to believe). The Nevada Comstock men made plans to create a corporation with \$10 million in capital. Rico became a boom town! From one log cabin in August, Rico had grown to 105 buildings only a month later! And the progression grew to 240 structures in December and 400 by February of 1880. However, many of the buildings consisted of only log walls without roofs, because milled lumber was not available.

Two sawmills were erected near Rico during the later part of 1879. These mills



were water-powered, and their machinery had to be freighted-in from Alamosa, which was the nearest railhead (on the Denver & Rio Grande) at that time. No wagon roads had yet been constructed, and it was a tremendous feat to cut a trail through the mountains from Durango to Rico. The cost of freighting was greater than the cost of the milling machinery. The first sawmill was set up by James R. McJunkin, about four miles north of Rico, while George Barlow erected the second sawmill about a mile upstream from McJunkin's mill. Neither mill produced much sawn lumber in 1879 before

winter set in, but both operated night and day during the following year, in an attempt to keep up with the building boom at Rico.

The first meeting to organize the town was held on August 18, 1879. The town was incorporated during December, and Frank W. Raymond was elected Rico's first mayor on December 22, 1879. The year of 1879 was the period for many "firsts" for Rico. The first edition of **THE DOLORES NEWS**, Rico's first newspaper, appeared on August 21, 1879. The editor was Charles A. Mantz, and he soon became well known for his colorful writ-

*(Continued on Page 98)*



RICHARD A. RONZIO COLLECTION

**FROM AN ANGLE** farther up Dolores Mountain, an unknown photographer took this view of Rico, believed to have been taken during the late 1880's. Commercial Street is in sight, at the far right, located parallel with Glasgow Avenue, which

is situated a block down the hillside. Snowcapped Elliott Mountain is on the distant horizon. Rico boasted of having a skating rink during 1885. The rink apparently was located in an open field in Block 2, Lot 5.

ing style. The first organization in town was the Miners Union. However, the Miners Union was a social club and not a labor union. It should be pointed out that Rico never had the severe labor strife and violence that embattled Telluride, only 20 miles away—although there were labor disputes with management, as might be expected.

Business establishments began to develop along Glasgow Avenue, Rico's main commercial thoroughfare. During September, the U.S. Post Office Depart-

ment opened an agency in a drug store.

Rico's worst Indian scare took place on the night of October 5, 1879. The Meeker Massacre was still on everyone's mind, and all precautions were taken. The women and children were housed in a strong, windowless cabin, and the men converted Raymon's General Store on Glasgow Avenue into a fortress. However, the Indians never appeared, and the only casualty of the night was an unfortunate burro, who was the victim of a "spooked" sentry's bullet.

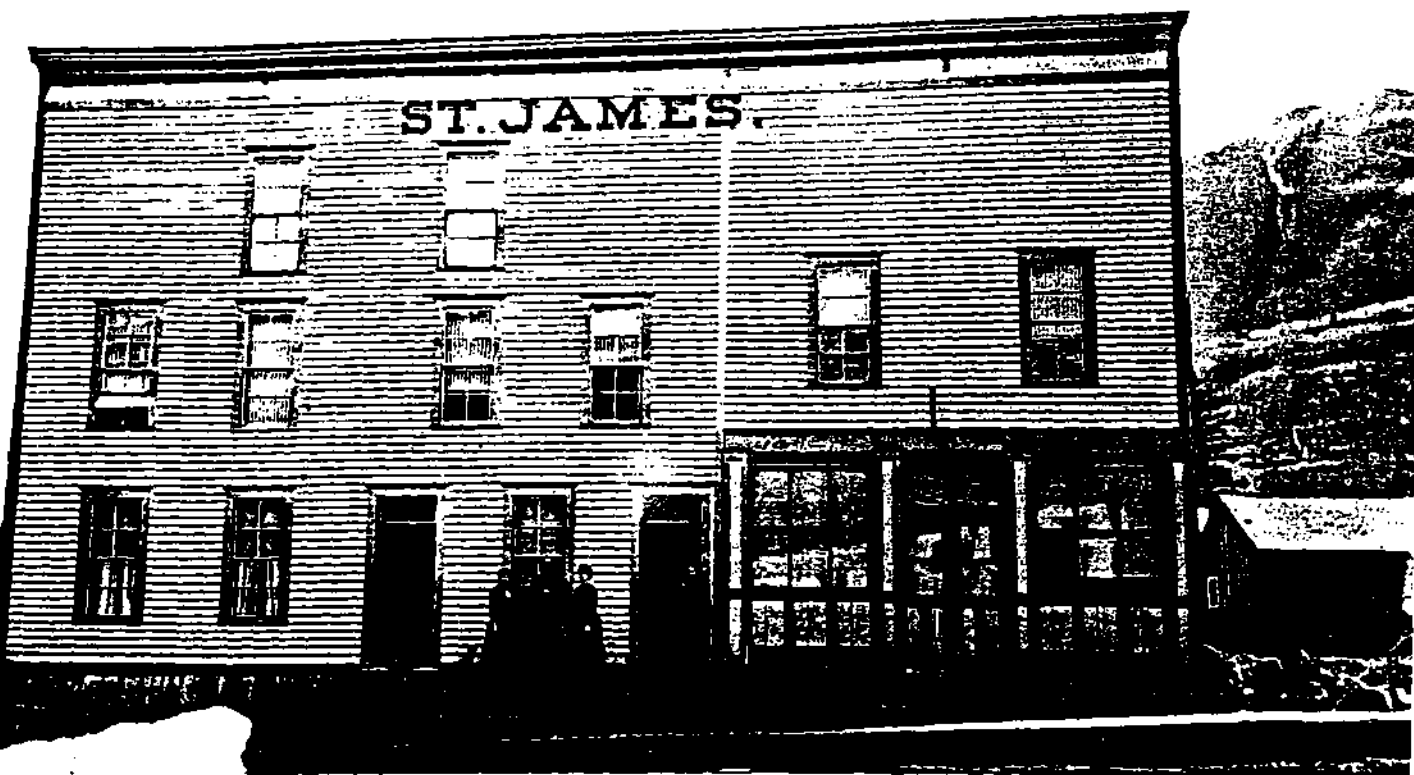
**1880** Although Rico was snowbound during January of 1880, J. F. Wannemaker was able to get into the place to survey the new townsite and divide it into lots and streets. The lots were 25 feet wide, while Glasgow Avenue was 100 feet wide, the town's main street. It ran north and south and eventually became the route for the highway through town. The townsite also ran north and south, and it measured one mile in length by one-half mile in width.

The winter of 1880 was an extremely difficult time for Rico. Everything was in short supply, and food was the most critically deficient item. Merchants and residents had attempted to lay-in food and other supplies for the winter. However, the town was blockaded by snow for a

much longer time than was anticipated. No pack trains were able to get through with provisions from November until April of the following year. Food shortages were the most critical, and any kind of food sold at unbelievable prices. The ordeal was not forgotten, and it was not repeated the following winter. (See the newspaper accounts of this snow blockade elsewhere in this volume.)

The building boom that began in 1879 continued right on through 1880. The official 1880 census listed Rico's population as 894, and the town was growing rapidly. By summertime, Rico had six general stores, four meat markets, three hotels, two dancehalls, three blacksmith shops, two banks, one doctor, two lawyers, many saloons and only one tent

*(Continued on Page 102)*



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**THE ST. JAMES HOTEL** in Rico appears on the Sanborn Map & Publishing Company map of 1886. This hotel was located in Block 14 and faced west on Glasgow Avenue, not far south of the Silver Creek bridge. The frame structure contained a dining room and kitchen on the main floor, in the left half, which also had an office. The staircase to the rooms was through the central door. Boarding here cost \$7.00 per week. The right third

of the main floor probably was leased as a retail store, with living quarters above. This side had a dirt roof over the rear of the structure. A silver plate, wine and cigars were stolen from the hotel on May 20, 1884. The culprits left the county when discovered. On April 10, 1891, **THE RICO DEMOCRAT** reported that Mr. Fred Archambault, proprietor of the St. James Hotel, was raising nine hogs, which had an average weight of 200 pounds each.

building for a church. (Does the ratio of saloons to church buildings bespeak the moral values of the boom period?)

Two additional sawmills were constructed near Rico, and lumber was voraciously consumed to build hundreds of houses, as well as for improving existing structures—utilized for better roofs, doors and windows. Nearby coal was available to townspeople for the taking; however it was of poor quality. A public school board was formed, but there was not yet a school building. A school term of several months was established; however, the students were forced to meet in very poor quarters.

The story of the Grand View Smelter began in 1880. Rico needed two things in order to prosper in the economy of 1880: It needed a smelter and better, less-expensive transportation. Of course, a railroad would provide cheaper transportation in the years to come. However, in 1880, a railroad to Rico was hardly even a dream. The nearest "end-of-track" (as railroaders called the point at the end of a rail line) was somewhere between Alamosa, Colorado, and Chama, New Mexico, en route to Durango, Colorado, by way of remote Toltec Gorge and Cumbres Pass. This was General William J. Palmer's famous narrow-gauge "San Juan Extension," being built to tap the mineral riches of the San Juan Region. Realistically, Rico dreamed of a passable road for heavy freight wagons, so that wagons could replace mule trains that had to use many miles of poor pack-train trails.

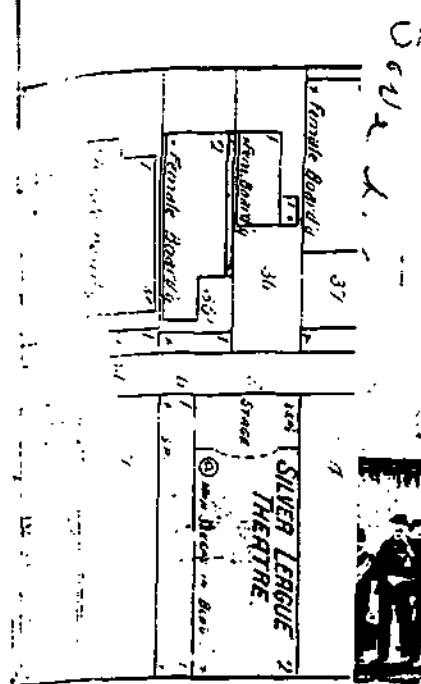
The outlook for a smelter was more promising. Most of the ore in Rico's Pioneer Mining District was high in lead content, which was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the composition of the silver-lead ore made it ideal for smelting. And smelting would greatly reduce the volume and weight of the refined product that had to be transported to the outside world. On the other hand, the value of lead was only about 4 cents per pound, while the cost of freighting ore from Rico to Alamosa was about 12

cents per pound. Only a concentrated product from a smelter, which was rich in silver or gold, could be handled at a profit. During February of 1880, Senator John P. Jones announced the creation of the Grand View Mining & Smelting Company. He stated that this firm would construct a smelter in Rico. The town was overjoyed at this announcement!

Every new rumor about the Grand View Smelter produced a new wave of excitement in the town. The machinery for the new smelter arrived in Alamosa during late April of 1880. However, moving the heavy machinery to Rico was an incredible task. Eighty-five mules were required to create a wagon train for the machinery. Of course, Rico did not yet have a wagon road, and when the wagons came down Bear Creek Hill, south of Rico, the wagons had to be lowered by "snubbing" (reeling) them down the hill by using ropes and chains that encircled large trees. The wagon train entered Rico on the Fourth of July amid wild celebration. The site for the new smelter was about 500 feet north of Silver Creek, near the outskirts of town. Four months were needed to erect the smelter and test it.

The first production run of 12 hours was on November 17, 1880, which produced 25 bars of silver bullion, and this proved to everyone's great relief that the silver-lead ore was of a type that could be smelted. Although the smelter had produced silver bullion, the smelting machinery had some operating problems typical of any new plant. However, by December, the smelter was running steadily around the clock. Twenty-four men worked two 12-hour shifts.

**1881** Although Ute Indian reservations had been established in the 1870's, violent incidents between Indians and whites were still common, both on and off the reservations. Sometimes, prospectors could not resist the temptation to enter the reservations in their search for minerals. And the Indians still harassed white settlers. During June of 1881, two ranchers in the Dolores Valley were killed by Indians, and a large group of whites was



MARGARET MATZICK COLLECTION

**THE SILVER LEAGUE THEATRE** was known as one of the finest entertainment centers in southwestern Colorado. It occupied Lots 5, 6 and 7, in Block 2, and it faced toward the east. This fine theater building was photographed in 1892. However, the structure burned to the ground in

1898. This happened in spite of the efforts of both the M.P.S. and the A. P. Adams volunteer fire brigades. Charlie Rohde (with the arrow over his head), at the far right, was the owner of the theater at this time. It occupied the lot previously used as an ice-skating rink.

organized to chase and punish the Indians. The chase led to the La Sal Mountains in Utah, where the Indians barricaded themselves among the rocks. In the inevitable gun battle that followed, men on both sides were killed. Six of the whites that were killed were from Rico.

Civilization was gradually coming to Rico, though. Dolores County was created from part of Ouray County in 1881. Ministers of different faiths visited Rico from time to time and held religious services in several buildings; however, no church congregation was formally organized until later. Two additional sawmills were erected near Rico, and frame buildings of improved construction appeared.

Rico needed a wagon road very badly to replace the pack-train trails. After two years of false starts, a successful company was incorporated in 1881. The firm was financed by \$6,000, raised by the residents of Rico, in order for it to build a toll road. The new toll road was built

south along the Dolores River to its confluence with Scotch Creek, where it turned east and climbed up along Scotch Creek into the La Plata Mountains. It crossed the mountain ridge and dropped down along Hermosa Creek to the town of Hermosa on the Animas River. Hermosa was 11 miles north of Durango; and a wagon road had already been built to connect the two towns. The new road was completed in September of 1881. It was a success and greatly lowered freight rates.

**1882** When construction of the Denver & Rio Grande's Silverton Branch reached Rockwood during January of 1882, a new and better wagon road was built to connect with the railroad at Rockwood. The new road ran south from Rico along the Dolores River, to the confluence with Scotch Creek. The road then headed east up steep slopes along Scotch Creek, over the La Plata Mountains and down to Rockwood, for a total distance of 35

miles. Two stage companies began to provide connecting Concord stagecoach service from Rockwood to Rico, using the new wagon road. **THE DOLORES NEWS**, published in Rico, reported that the Concord coaches were "...immense and gorgeous." The stagecoaches were pulled by four-horse teams, and the scheduled time for the trip was eight hours. The one-way fare was \$7.00, plus an additional \$1.70 train fare to Durango. The D&RG and the stagecoaches also carried mail and express shipments.

Rico struggled for several years to provide a public school building. Finally, in 1882, donations, a loan and a two-mill property tax provided the money required to construct the new schoolhouse—\$1,239.00—and hire a teacher. Mrs. Robert Darling, the wife of Robert Darling, a Rico pioneer, was hired as the new school teacher. The new school building was described by **THE DOLORES NEWS** as "...that neat and cozy little school house, with its bright paint—its steeple and surroundings." The little building was filled to capacity, and the 1882–1883 school term ran for five months. A closing-day school program for parents and friends, which featured the children, was well received.

The year 1882 was the "year of the smelter" in Rico. The new Grand View Smelter had been in operation for a year and a half. The hands-on operating experience was invaluable, and the output and efficiency of the smelter was raised to a very satisfactory level. The success inspired the management to plan a large expansion program. The new smelter addition would have a concentrator that would make smelting of low-grade ore profitable. A large new building was constructed, and new machinery was installed. Trial runs were successful, and the smelter was soon running smoothly and producing about two tons of bullion every 24 hours.

Successful smelting at the Grand View plant brought competition. Three new smelters were built in Rico in 1882. The Rico Smelting Company's smelter

was built on the south side of town, near the Dolores River. The Santa Clara Mining & Milling Company and the Rico Chemical Reduction Company constructed new smelters north of town, near the head of Horse Gulch. The new smelters had some mechanical problems, and the Rico Smelting Company had financial problems, but the smelters operated well enough to prove that Rico's ore could be efficiently and profitably processed.

#### **RICO BUSINESS ENTERPRISES as of 1882 (from THE DOLORES NEWS):**

4 General merchandise stores	4 Billiard halls
1 Hardware house	12 Saloons
2 Banks	2 Wholesale liquor houses
2 Hotels	2 Drug stores
3 Sawmills	1 Cobbler shop
1 Smelter	2 Barbers
2 Brickyards	2 Jewelers
3 Livery stables	1 Gunsmith
3 Blacksmith shops	2 Dressmaker shops
1 Bakery	5 Laundries (1 Chinese)
2 Restaurants	3 Assay offices
2 Meat markets	1 Photograph gallery
1 Boarding house	1 Stage and Express office
1 Bath house	1 Wagon shop
2 Confectionary stores	3 Painters
3 Physicians	5 Ore cabinets
6 Lawyers	and several carpenters
3 Tobacco and cigar stands	7 Grocery stores

**1883** With the new smelters on line, Rico's ore production doubled in 1883. Production was geared almost entirely for silver. Gold, copper and lead were also produced, but 88 percent of the total value was silver. Rico was truly a silver camp!

#### **RICO AREA MINE LOCATIONS in 1883 (from THE DOLORES NEWS):**

<b>MINE LOCATIONS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF MINES</b>
1 Dolores Mountain	23
2 Telescope Mountain	18
3 Horse Gulch	8
4 Elliot Mountain	12
5 Expectation Mountain	15
6 Printer Boy Hill (on Expectation Mountain)	12
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>88</b>

**1884** The candidates in the 1884 presidential election were Grover Cleveland and James Blaine. Democrat Cleveland was seen as a "gold bug," so a silver camp like Rico voted for his opponent. This was no surprise, because the people of Rico felt that the Republicans were more sympathetic to the mining industry, and for many years voted accordingly.

The winter of 1883–1884 produced snow eight feet deep in Rico. The wagon



roads were blockaded from February to June, and Rico ran short of food and coal. Flour sold for as much as \$50 for a 100-pound sack. And mail delivery was very erratic.

**1885** A wagon road was built along the Middle Fork of Horse Creek north of Rico to a non-incorporated settlement named "Dunton," on the West Fork of the Dolores River (as the West Dolores River was called at this time). Dunton's economy primarily depended on ranching, but there was also a little mining activity in the area. (See "The Story of Dunton" on Page 29 in this volume.)

**1887** David Swickhimer uncovered an incredibly rich blanket of gold and silver at his Enterprise Mine. The Enterprise became the most productive mine in Rico's Pioneer Mining District. (See "David Swickhimer and the Enterprise Mine" on Page 219 in this volume.)

**1889** The phenomenal production of silver ore at the Enterprise Mine rejuvenated mine development, and encouraged the discovery of new ore bodies throughout the district. Ore production quadrupled in one year. Almost 80 percent of the total ore value was silver.

**1890** The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 brought about the biggest mining boom that Rico ever knew. This act called for the U.S. government to purchase 4,500,000 ounces of silver each month, and silver was Rico's main product. The purpose of the silver-purchase act was to stabilize the Nation's currency and to maintain the public confidence in paper money by backing it with silver. Theoretically at least, paper money could be redeemed at any time for silver coinage. The amount of silver that the government was to purchase was about equal to the country's production, and the act specified that the silver was to be bought at market price. The result of such large purchases was to increase the market price of silver from 94 cents an ounce to \$1.05 an ounce in 1890. Rico could not have been in a better position—the opportunity to sell large amounts of silver at a high price. Mine owners and managers

had correctly forecasted the boom, and the Rico area's silver production increased from 123,852 ounces in 1888 to 618,615 ounces in 1889, and to 848,785 ounces in 1890. All the mines in the Rico area were in a square about three miles on each side. About 2,000 mining claims were recorded in this area.

Rico was the only incorporated town in the Pioneer Mining District. The official 1890 census showed that the population of Rico had grown to 1,134 people. An additional estimated 400 people lived outside the town limits, but within the mining district. With the population soaring, there was not an empty building to be found. Earlier wooden buildings were replaced with brick and stone structures. Some of these buildings are still standing today (as of 1995). The first church building in Rico was the Congregational Church. It was organized by the Rev. T. C. Dickinson, with financial help from the national organization of the Congregational Church.

(Continued on Page 129)

#### From THE DOLORES NEWS, January 2, 1886



**Private Line Telephones**  
For an exchange office and residence or factory, both suitable. Having  
taken place of Bell Telephone on all  
lines under the same to length. By  
Hydraulic. Tel. No. 10, 100  
in use. Circulars free. A prominent  
Harvey Telephone Co.  
Dealers in Telephones and Electrical  
Supplies of every description.  
100 Lathrop St., Chicago.

#### OF INTEREST TO RICO

One of the first results of re-organization of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway will be the construction of a branch by way of the Big Bend to Rico. The company could hardly make a more profitable investment.

— The Durango Herald

**OVERLEAF:** An unknown man had climbed a short distance up Expectation Mountain in order to photograph this view of Rico. This presumably was done about 1890, as the Hotel Enterprise was in its original small size. This hotel underwent extensive rebuilding, beginning on March 20, 1891. It is seen as the largest building in Block 13, Lots 11, 12 and 13. The First National Bank building had been erected near the center of this view. Most of the buildings are marked or drawn on the Sanborn Map of 1886. Later, the bottomland along the Dolores River (in the foreground) was sold to the Rio Grande Southern Railroad for its station grounds. In this view you are looking toward the east, with Mantz Avenue in the center and the Silver Creek drainage at the left. The white front of the St. James Hotel can be seen across the street from the Hotel Enterprise.

CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION  
— COURTESY RACHELA A. HARDWICK



Should the weather remain favorable for outdoor operations, the Southern will be completed to Durango in 40 days. The management will bend all their energies to accomplish this much desired result.

### **Large Force of Men Move South**

**OCTOBER 9, 1891**—The large force of men under Contractor Ryan have finished here, and yesterday broke camp and took up the line of march down the river a short distance, where Mr. Ryan has another piece of construction work.

Superintendent Ridgway was in Rico this week with his special [train]. While here, he personally superintended the laying of a wye in the Rico yard. When anything in the track line is to be done, Bob sees the things done right.

### **Locomotive Engineer Visits Editor of The Rico Democrat**

**OCTOBER 9, 1891**—We were pleased to meet Mr. Alex Davidson, an engineer on the Rio Grande, who pulled Superintendent Ridgway's special into Rico this week. Alex is a good boy. Back in the 1880's, Alex put black diamonds in the firebox when the writer was sitting on the right side of a Baldwin.

Mr. Richard Plunkett, a San Juan Indian trader, was in town on Tuesday. While here arrangements were made by which Mr. Plunkett will bring to Rico, as an adjunct to the R.R. celebration on the 15th, a band of Navajo Indians, who will exhibit for the amusement of the large concourse of excursionists who will visit Rico on the formal opening of the railroad.

### **RGS WYE BEING LAID OUT IN RICO**

**OCTOBER 16, 1891**—Engineer Pees has been busy during the past week laying out [a wye] in the Southern yards.

## **THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT**

### ***A Chronology of Events***

*(Continued From Page 105)*

**1891** The first Rio Grande Southern train arrived in Rico during 1891. Ever since Rico's incorporation in 1879, growth and prosperity in the area had been held back by the high cost and unreliability of transportation to the outside world. During

1891 all the town's hope for ending its isolation depended on the construction of the RGS railroad. The RGS had a contract with Rico's city council for land and a right-of-way in town provided that the railroad should reach Rico by November 1, 1890. It was especially galling to Rico residents when the RGS completed its branch to Telluride in 1890, but failed to reach Rico during that year.

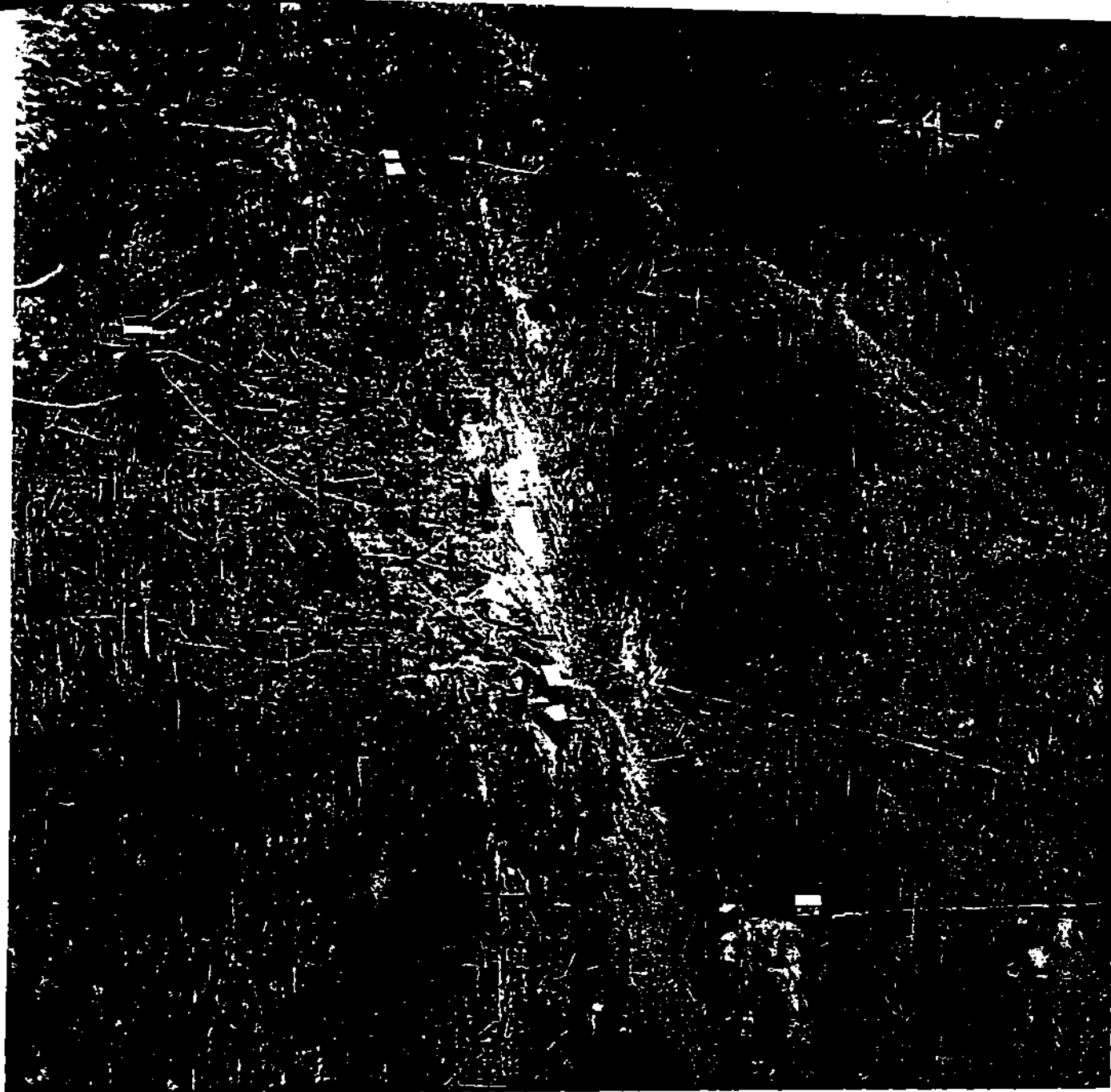
Perky little Otto Mears had achieved what most people—and some experts—considered impossible. He had built 170 miles of narrow-gauge railroad through country that was so rugged that only three miles of track was on level ground. Little locomotives struggled hour after hour on the 167 miles, climbing over four divides, each one of which led their trains to new watersheds. Otto Mears' political and financial skills also were truly remarkable.

*(Continued on Page 207)*

### **AN ARTICLE FROM THE RICO DEMOCRAT...**

#### **FIRE IN FIRST NATIONAL BANK**

**May 8, 1891**—Monday evening, about 8:00 o'clock, an alarm of fire was given, which was promptly responded to by the [volunteer] fire department. The fire was located in the First National Bank building, over the suite of rooms occupied by Kincaid & Williams, lawyers. Investigation showed, however, that the burning out of a [stove] flue was the cause of the alarm. No damage was done to the building or contents further than that occasioned by a torrent of water turned into the flue from the top, which found an escape through a lateral flue-hole into the consultation room of the firm above named, which ruined the carpets and did some damage to a portion of their library. On the same floor is the offices of T. J. Tarsney, W. B. Hess, Charles McLaughlin and A. H. Mundee. The libraries, books and furniture was removed to places of safety, and but little damage was sustained except that above named. The manner in which the fire boys performed for the first time under Chief Gault, and the orderly manner in which they carried out his orders, reflects the greatest credit upon them, and is an assurance to our citizens of efficient service at their hands in the event of a fire.



F. L. RANSOME PHOTOS - U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY COLLECTION

**TWO MINE TRAMHOUSES** were clinging precariously to the precipitous slope of Allyn Gulch. The upper building was at the portal of the Little Maggie Mine, and it is connected to the lower structure by an aerial tramway. The lower building was at the adit of the Black Hawk Mine, and was the upper tramhouse for the aerial tramway to the ore bins located near the end of the Black Hawk spur. The Little Maggie Mine also was the property of the Black Hawk mining company. The material sliding down the gulch was tailings from both mines. (Enlargement above from Page 206.)

**DURING THE YEAR 1900**, F. L. Ransome furnished the photograph printed at the left to the U.S. Geological Survey of the Interior Department. It shows Allyn Gulch, the location of the Black Hawk Mine. Mr. Ransome shot his picture from the ridge of Nigger Baby Hill, northeast of Rico.

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

*By William A. Graves*

*(Continued From Page 129)*

**1892** The Rio Grande Southern's division point at Rico was a busy operation in 1892, and this helped to make the town a bustling place. The RGS was organized into two divisions, with Rico as the division point. That meant that many railroaders lived in Rico. An extensive rail-



ORVAL L. JAHNKE COLLECTION

**ONE OPENING** of the Argentine Mine and tailings dump was located above Silver Creek, and it was photographed at the time when mules were used to pull the mine's tramway cars. These little four-wheeled dump cars had been coupled together, ready to be hauled into the mine. The thoughtful miners had attached a carbide lamp on the front of the harness, aimed at the ground so the mule could see where he was stepping, in order to avoid fallen rocks.

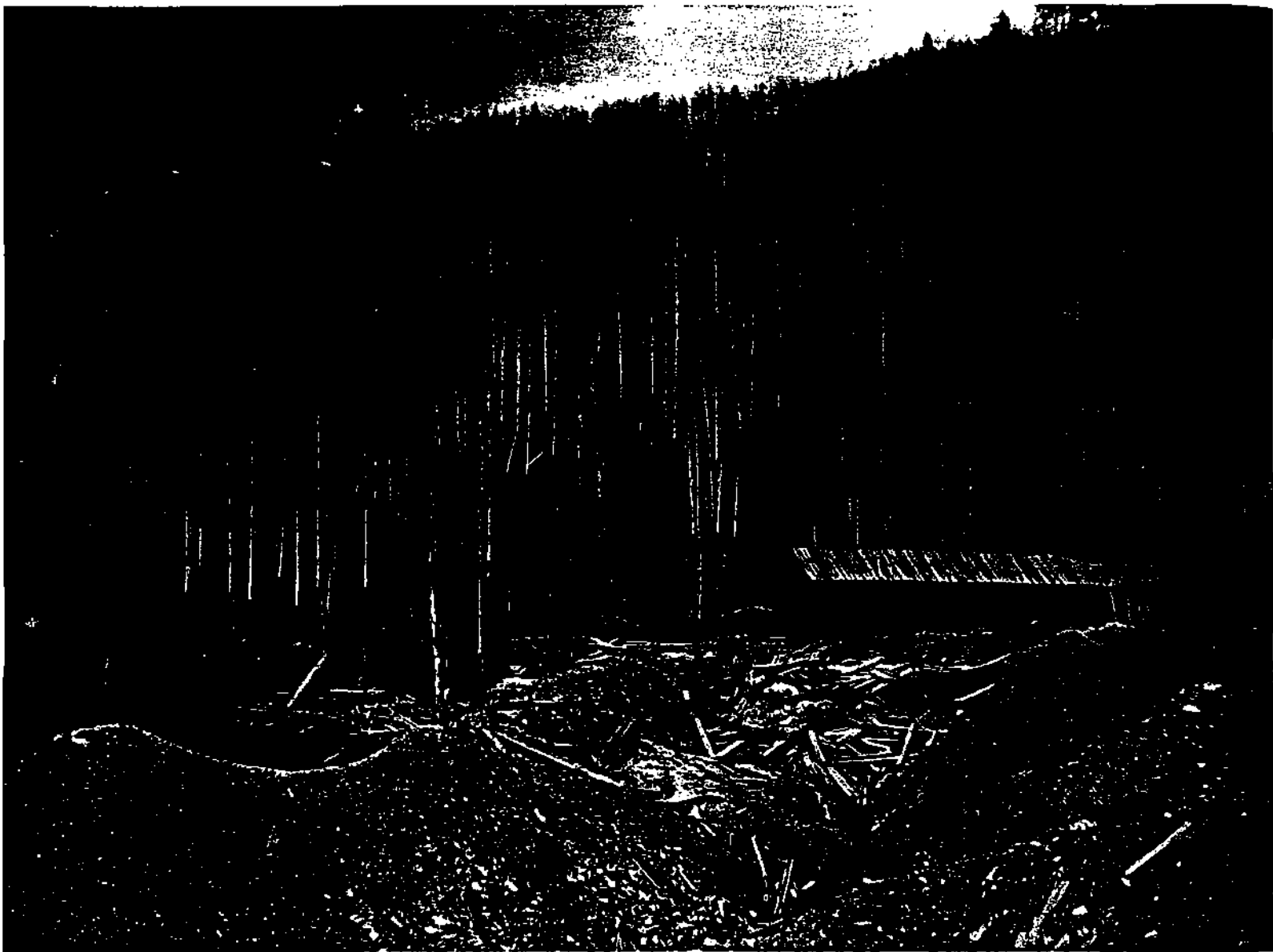
road yard and engine-servicing terminal was constructed to handle the railroad traffic and maintain the equipment. The RGS contributed a good-sized payroll to the town's economy.

After the RGS arrived in Rico, the life style of the town changed dramatically. No longer did the residents have to depend on freight wagons struggling over snowy or muddy roads to get necessities during the winter. The days of shortages and \$50.00 sacks of flour or \$3.00-a-

dozen eggs were a thing of the past. The RGS would have more than its share of troubles, but to Rico residents, it was their lifeline.

The benefit of lower transportation costs was immediate. Freight rates that had been \$50.00 per ton in 1880 were only \$8.00 or \$9.00 per ton in 1892 on the RGS. Production of gold and silver doubled in one year. Lead production tripled. There was no official census in 1892; however, unofficial estimates re-

*(Continued on Page 218)*



ported that Rico's population doubled or tripled, with 5,000 people living in the district and 2,000 men working in the mines. It was reported that 599 mines were operating in 1892. Many new substantial buildings were constructed, some of which are still standing. These new buildings included the Burley Block, the Dolores County Courthouse (a brick structure built in 1893), the Dey building, the Masonic Lodge building, the public school, the RGS depot (built in 1891) and the first enginehouse (a two-stall wooden structure), the Rico Mercantile Store, the Rico State Bank and the Silver League Theatre.

Glasgow Avenue became Rico's main business street early in the town's history. The present-day state highway (Colorado

Highway 145) passes through Rico on Glasgow Avenue. A relatively small red-light district was centered around River Street. Although bordellos were illegal, the so-called "Female Boarding House" was not harassed by local authorities.

The Enterprise Branch of the RGS was built in 1892 to reach Rico's two most productive mines, the Enterprise, on Newman Hill, and the Black Hawk, located on the Silver Creek watershed. The Enterprise Mine originally was owned by David Swickhimer (and other partners), and it was the discovery of rich ore at the Enterprise that had set off the mining boom in Rico in 1887. The Black Hawk Mine had been claimed in 1878 by R. C. Darling, John Glasgow and E. A. Robinson. Otto Mears was also an investor in



DELL A. MCCOY PHOTOS

**IN THE EARLY PART** of June, as aspen buds began to leaf out, a hike was taken along the old Enterprise Branch grade to the end-of-track at the mine opening. The shed covering the mine track was still standing, at the right. The ore bins, at the left, were in ruins.

**THE ENTERPRISE MINE** entrance shed was photographed in 1966, showing the north side, as the photographer stood next to the abandoned narrow-gauge grade of the Enterprise Branch. The old structure that was the ore house was almost unrecognizable.

the Black Hawk mining operation.

The Enterprise portal site, also known as the site of the Group Tunnel, looks down on the town, about 400 feet below. The nearby Rico-Aspen Mine was owned by the Rico-Aspen Consolidated Mining Company, which had been formed in 1891, and whose president was the prominent banker and railroad builder, David Moffat.

Rivalry between the Enterprise and the Rico-Aspen became violent in a disputed underground area, near the property boundaries. Enterprise miners set off sulfur fires in the disputed tunnels, but not before the Rico-Aspen miners had already extracted most of the ore. The Enterprise eventually won the dispute, after lengthy litigation. Both mines were good producers, and after completion of

the spur, the Enterprise Mine regularly shipped about 150 cars a month, and the Rico-Aspen Mine was reported to have shipped about 60 cars a month.

*(Continued on Page 223)*

## **DAVID SWICKHIMER AND THE ENTERPRISE MINE**

*By William A. Graves*

**THE ENTERPRISE MINE** became the dominant mine in Rico, Colorado, in the late 1880's, and this mine sparked the biggest mining boom that the town has ever had. In three years, annual silver production went from less than 100,000 ounces to over 600,000 ounces. As a result, Rico's population increased rapidly, and all kinds of things were scarce.

The Enterprise Mine paid to have a five-mile railroad branch constructed by the Rio Grande Southern, so that ore could be shipped directly from the mine. The Enterprise Branch had switchbacks and 5.0-percent grades, and it terminated near the mine's tunnel portal. The Enterprise was a major shipper for the RGS, and it often provided five carloads of ore per day. The last year of operation at the mine is not known; however, freight cars are shown on the branch in an 1899 photograph. In any case, the reported date for the abandonment of the RGS trackage to the mine is 1900.

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

*By William A. Graves*

*(Continued From Page 219)*

**1893** Prosperity in Rico reached a peak early in 1893. Driven by the Federal government's purchases of silver, over \$2-million worth of silver was produced that year. In addition, the production of gold and lead also peaked in 1893. However, this over-production of silver at Rico was

*(Continued on Page 226)*



C. W. PURINGTON PHOTO - U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY COLLECTION

**THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN** during the summer of 1896. It documents the flourishing mining activity that took place near the base of Dolores Mountain—on the slopes of Newman Hill, just prior to the turn of the century. The same photograph has been enlarged and printed on the following two pages, in order to better show the detail in this scene. The Enterprise Mining Company's Group Tunnel was shipping five boxcar loads of ore per day at the time this photograph was taken. Looking at the ore bins, two loaded

boxcars had been rolled down from the ore chutes, and one remained at the tipple for loading. At the same time, two empty boxcars were at the end of "empty track," waiting to be eased down for loading. The Vestal shaft was the highest location in this illustration, and the Jumbo was a short distance below it. Midway in this picture are huge mine dumps from the Newman Group of mines. At the right-hand edge of the view is the Syndicate mining property, with its support structures.

also taking place throughout Colorado and other Western states, and over-production caused the price of silver to drop. The Federal government's large horde of silver also was seen as a threat to the gold standard of the Federal Reserve System. Bankers began to lose faith in paper currency, and hundreds of banks in the U.S. began to close their doors. This crisis was blamed on the inflation of the silver price, and the so-called "Silver Panic of 1893" caused the Sherman Silver Purchase Act to be repealed on October 31, 1893. The end of the government purchases was a great disaster for Rico. Hundreds of mines in the Rico area closed their operations, and the miners departed. Many merchants also closed their businesses and left town. Although Rico survived, it had a greatly reduced population, and it never could recover its earlier booming vitality.

**1894** The price of silver fell to 63 cents per ounce in 1894, and ore production in the Rico mining district dropped to less than one-half of what it was during the previous year. Traffic on the RGS also decreased to less than one half of what it was in 1893, and many railroad employees were laid off or had their wages cut.

**1895** Production of ore continued to decrease, and the output in 1895 was only about one-third of 1894's production. Mining had also slowed because the best ore deposits at the Enterprise, Rico-Aspen and other Newman Hill mines

(Continued on Page 244)

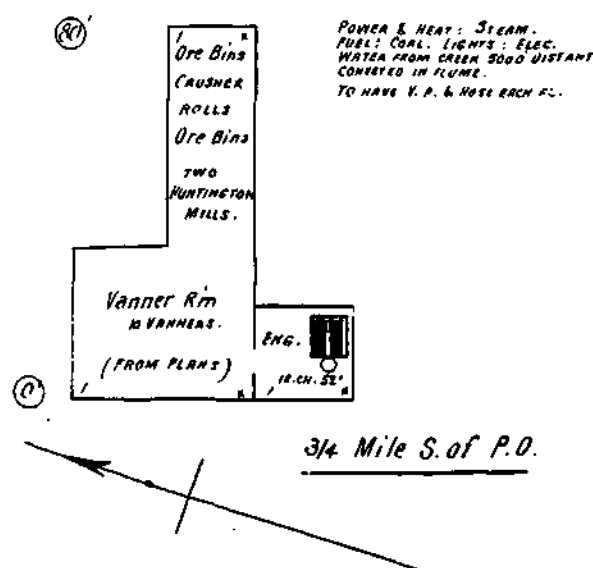
## COLORADO MILLING & CONCENTRATING COMPANY WET PROCESS MILL

See Pages 232, 234 and 236

**SANBORN**

MAPPING AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SERVICE

— 1899 —



Mountain Side.

1 1/2 Miles S of P.O.

(Temporarily Closed)

RICO & ASPEN CONSOLIDATED MINING COMPANY

## RICO & ASPEN CONSOLIDATED MINING COMPANY

See Picture Pages 232, 235 and 237

**SANBORN**

MAPPING AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SERVICE

— 1899 —



MONTE BALLOUGH PHOTO - COURTESY MARGARET BALLOUGH PALMER

**THIS PHOTOGRAPH**, taken by one of Rico's resident photographers, was shot in 1900, prior to the construction of the Pro Patria mill. This large mill was later constructed at the end of Mantz Avenue.

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

*By William A. Graves*

*(Continued From Page 226)*

were just about mined-out. The RGS transferred the majority of its stocks and bonds to the D&RG, and in return, the D&RG acquired much of the Rio Grande Southern's indebtedness. These moves made the D&RG the principal owner of the RGS, and the receivership ended on December 1, 1895.

**1896** Recovery of zinc from Rico ore was reported for the first time in 1896, and 30,000 pounds were produced. In later years, zinc became the mainstay of production for the district.

**1897** The price of silver was down to 63 cents per ounce. Some small-scale mining and two stamp mills kept Rico alive.

**1898** Mining had a brief revival, and several mines were reopened. About a dozen businesses and several professional of-

**TO ENHANCE** the details in this picture, it has been enlarged by 300 percent and reproduced on the next three pages. The northeast section of Rico appears in the first frame and shows the homes of that time. The schoolhouse built in 1892, along with two outhouses, is at the lower right. The home of Charles Engel, Sr., stands alone near the center of the view.

fices kept their doors open. Unfortunately, the Silver League Theatre, located on Glasgow Avenue, was destroyed by fire in 1898. The theater had been used by traveling road shows, as well as a local performing company, to put on plays, musicals and variety shows (the very popular "Gay Nineties" vaudeville performances, which featured lively songs, dances, skits, acrobatic acts, pretty girls in colorful costumes, etc.).

**1899** This was a slow year for Rico, as the 1898 mining revival slowed down.

*(Continued on Page 254)*





DELL A. MCCOY PHOTO

**THE RICO TOWN HALL** currently occupies the former Dolores County Courthouse (as of 1996). In this winter view, taken in 1990, the old Congre-

gational Church still stands on Mantz Avenue, and a glimpse of the former Charles Miller Engel home is beyond Commercial Street, near the fire plug.

**1900** Rico's population and ore production continued to decline. According to the official 1900 census, the town's population was down to 811 people. The yearly total value of ore production was only \$173,817, a drop of 90 percent in seven years. The only ore produced in the district was mined by small-scale operators, who leased small areas of the big mines.

**1901** A major consolidation of Rico's mine holdings came about in 1901. A newly formed corporation, known as the United Rico Mines Company, had its main offices in New York City. The new com-

pany acquired most of the major properties in the district, including the Atlantic Cable, Cross, Enterprise, Grand View, Hope and Rico-Aspen claims. New ideas for the milling of lead-and-zinc ores helped to keep the district busy. The Rico Mining & Milling Company constructed a zinc-concentration mill, which used 20 stamps, 6 Wilfley tables and some newly developed devices called magnetic separators. These separators were intended to divide the ore into its lead, copper, iron and zinc components.

*(Continued on Page 264)*

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

By William A. Graves

(Continued From Page 254)

**1902** David Swickhimer's Pro Patria Company also was interested in the new type of separators, and a new concentration mill was built to use them. This mill was located at the foot of Mantz Avenue, and it was connected to the mine portal by a 3,600-foot-long aerial tramway. The RGS built a spur to serve the new Pro Patria (Spanish for "For Fatherland") mill. Although production at the new mill was started late in 1902, the milling results were not satisfactory, and the mill was little used until 1908.

**1903** Rico's only major fire burned the Hotel Enterprise to the ground in 1903. This hotel was a three-story building, and it measured about 60 feet in width and 75 feet in length. The grand Hotel Enterprise was the largest hostelry in town, and it had 62 rooms, not counting rooms in the Hotel Annex or other adjacent hotel buildings. The Enterprise had been the host hotel for the big banquet that celebrated the arrival of the RGS in Rico 12 years earlier. Unfortunately, this historic hotel was never rebuilt after the fire. Several smaller buildings nearby also caught fire and burned down at the same time. (See the complete story of the disastrous Hotel Enterprise fire in **THE RICO NEWS** article printed elsewhere in this volume.)

The Hotel Enterprise had been a favorite meeting place for Rico residents, and its loss lowered the town's morale. Ore production was down, the town's population was down, and over 60 percent of Rico's commercial businesses had closed their doors—and then, the Hotel Enterprise burned down.

**1906** Rico's economy began to depend more on the production of base metals. For the first time, the annual value of zinc production was greater than the value of silver output.

**1907** The yearly value of metal production in the Rico area was only \$56,283, and it was the lowest annual amount since 1880.

David Swickhimer's Rico State Bank failed as a result of the severe "Panic of 1907." Ignoring the advice of business associates, Swickhimer used his personal fortune to pay off the bank's depositors, a loss that financially ruined him. He was called Colorado's "most honest man" as a result of using all his wealth to pay back the Rico State Bank's depositors. Following David Swickhimer's bankruptcy, the United Rico Mines obtained a controlling interest in the Pro Patria property; however, this company went into bankruptcy itself four years later.

**1908** The Pro Patria mill started production again and helped to boost the output of lead and zinc concentrates in the district. However, the mill was destroyed by fire during October of 1908, and it remained inactive for the next five years.

**1909** Heavy rains during September of 1909 caused the Trout Lake dam to fail, and the San Miguel River washed out a lot of the Rio Grande Southern's track. This kept Telluride isolated for months, and it meant that through train service was interrupted.

**1910** This was another slow year for Rico. The town lost about half of its population during the 10-year period between 1900 and 1910. In the same period, ore production also dropped about one half.

(Continued on Page 333)



GOLD FILIGREE PASS FROM OTTO MEARS  
MORRIS ABBOTT COLLECTION - COURTESY E. J. HALEY



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## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

*By William A. Graves*

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*(Continued From Page 264)*

**1911** The flood of October, 1911, was even more costly for the RGS than the one that

occurred during 1909. Three months of heavy rain and a snowstorm that occurred during early autumn produced a disastrous flood along the Dolores River. Some 50 miles of RGS track north and south of Rico was washed out. Repairs cost the railroad \$174,000, and the main-line north of Rico was out of service for 3½ months. Silver Creek in Rico was

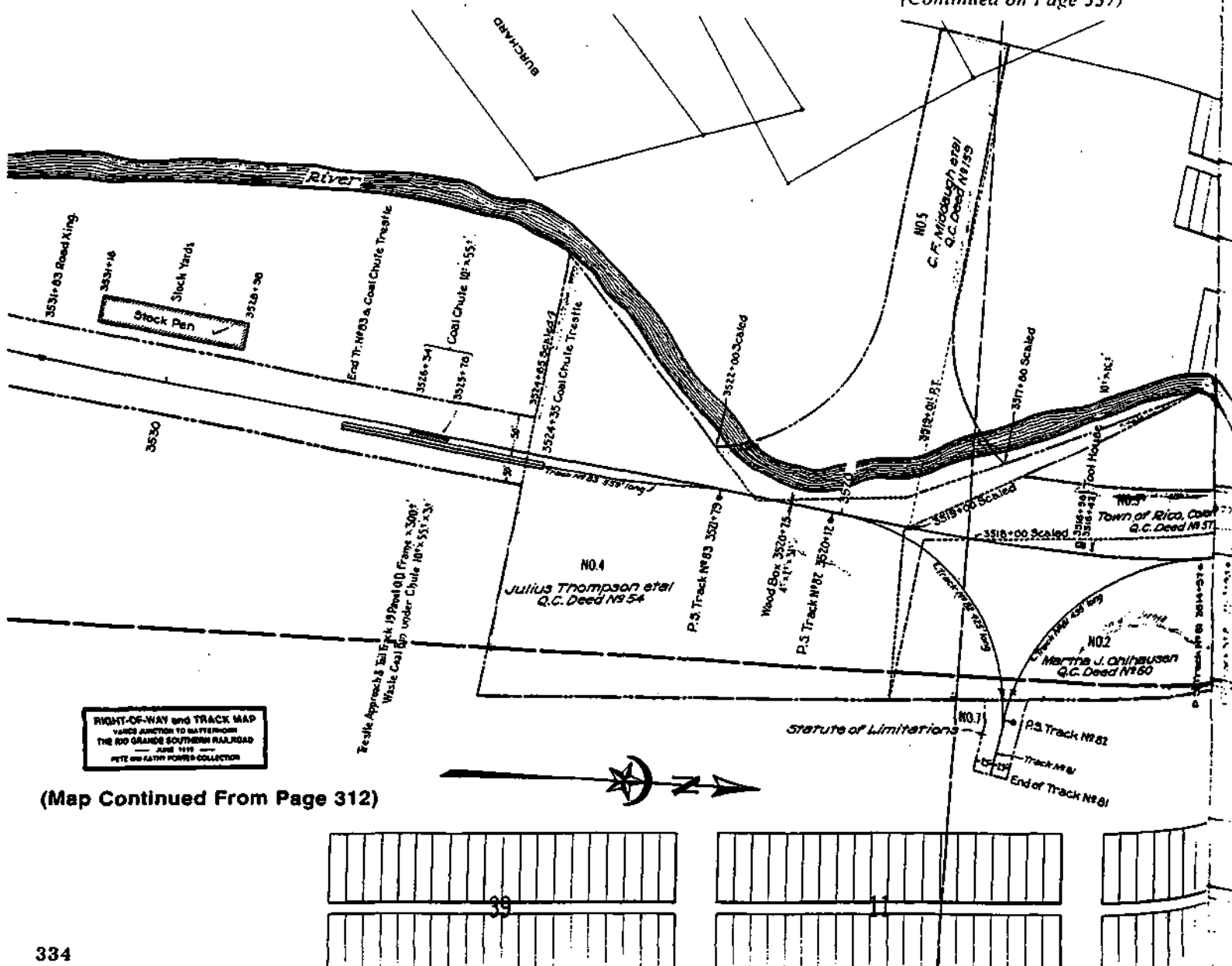
particularly violent and destroyed everything in its path, to a width of 200 feet. Although the Dolores River flooded to some degree almost every year, the 1911 flood probably was the most disastrous flooding ever to hit the RGS.

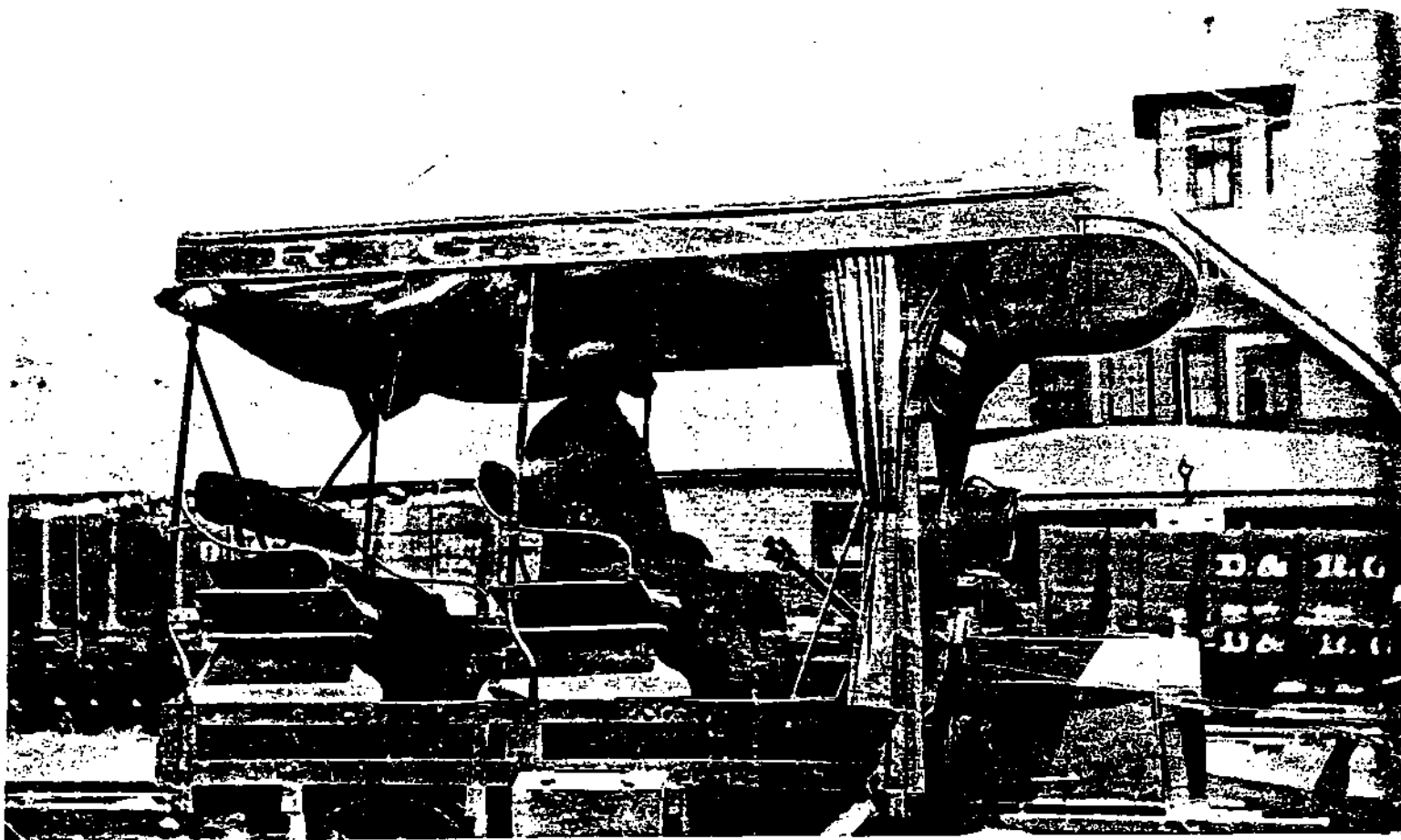
**1912** Many countries began to buildup their military forces, as the threat of war in Europe became stronger. The production of base metals—copper, lead and zinc—from the Rico mines experienced a big increase. Copper was the dominant metal, and undoubtedly it was used to produce brass for cartridge and shell casings. The mines of the Rico area produced 689,915 pounds of copper in 1912, and this amount was greater than Rico's total copper production for the preceding 10 years.

Much of this copper was mined at the Wellington group of mines, about two miles north of Rico, in an area known as the C.H.C. Hill, a location named for C. H. Carpenter. Fred Price of Salt Lake City formed the Rico-Argentine Company, which leased the old Black Hawk Mine. This company was active intermittently in the Rico area for over 60 years.

**1913** With the threat of war coming ever closer in Europe, ore production in the Rico area took a very big boost, to over \$500,000. The value of this production was greater than any year's production since 1894. The value of this ore was about evenly divided among silver, copper, lead and zinc. The Pro Patria mill was remodeled and operated for a short time.

(Continued on Page 337)





DAVID AND FAYE WOLFORD COLLECTION

**A RELATIVE OF HENRY WOLFORD**, David Wolford, had the honor of trying out the front seat of Walter D. Lee's inspection car, lettered "R. G. S. No. 1." The Model "T" conversion was in Rico during either 1914 or 1915. The unnecessary steering wheel had been removed, and canvas side curtains had been installed. W. D. Lee was the su-

perintendent of the RGS at this time. He had been photographed during 1913, near the Ophir Loop, featured in Volume IV of **THE R • G • S STORY**—as mentioned above—with the accompanying history concerning the happenings of this car. Notice the Rico depot in the background, which had been repainted in buff and brown by this time.

**1916** Most of the patented mining claims in Rico's Pioneer Mining District were acquired by the Syndicate Mining & Milling Company.

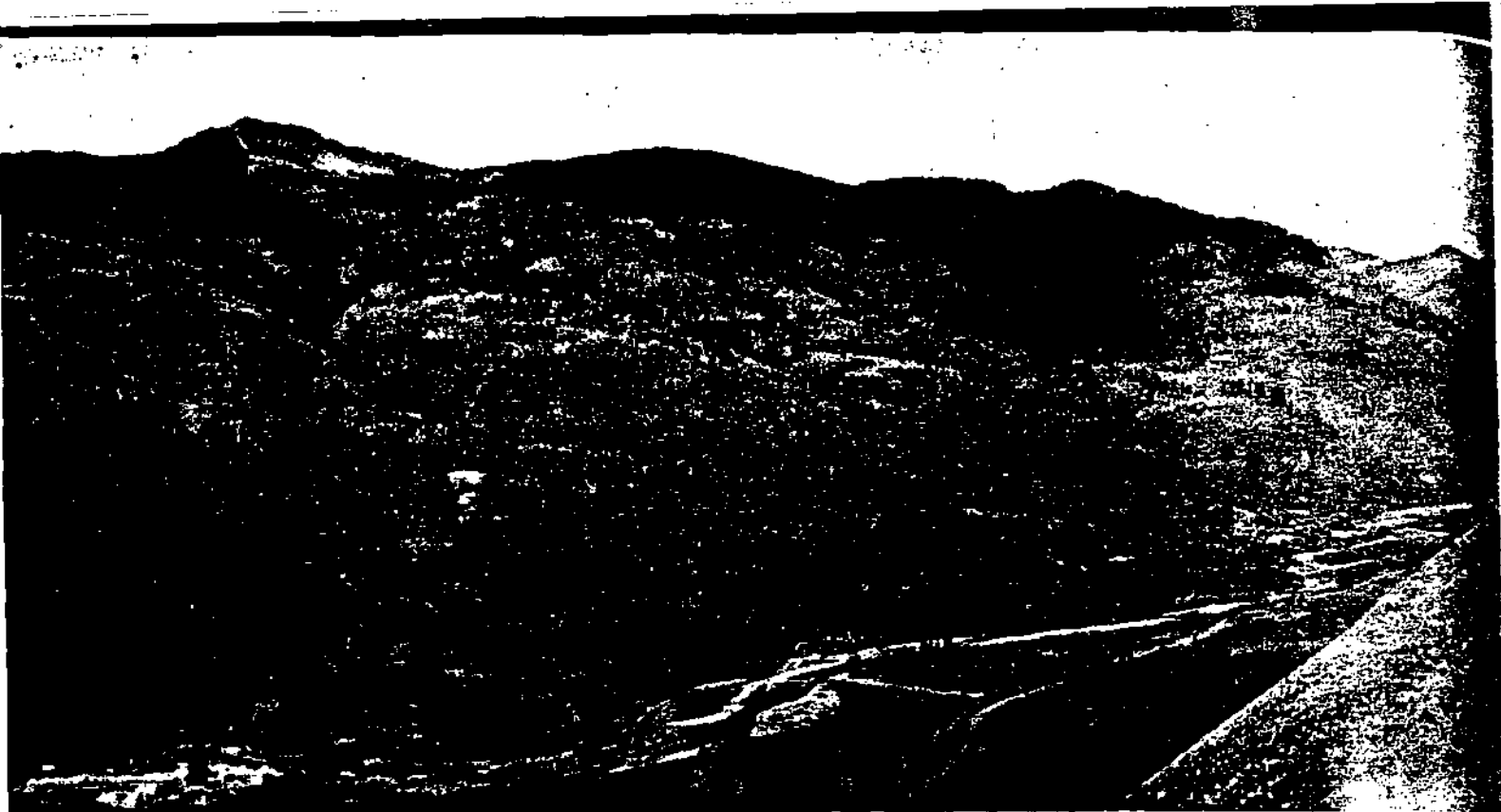
**1917** The price of silver, copper and lead increased as the United States entered World War I. The Rico district produced over \$500,000 in silver and base metals.

**1918** The price of silver rose to \$1.00 per ounce for the first time since 1890.

**1919** After the end of World War I, most of the world's attention was focussed on disarmament. Metal prices fell, and metal production in the Rico area dropped to one-third of the 1918 levels. Robert Pellet, a mining promoter, and his wife, Elizabeth Eyre Pellet, moved to Rico at this time. They would become very important residents for Rico, in their at-

**HENRY WOLFORD** stood beside Walter D. Lee's Model "T" Ford rail car, which had been converted from a secondhand automobile as RGS No. 1—officially called an inspection car. The car had undergone some modifications, which can be seen in this picture taken in 1915. The original headlights were replaced by one large headlight (with a curved lens), centered at the base of the windshield. This light may have been a carbide gas lamp judging from its domed top (with side vents), and the tube coming through the fire wall is of sufficient diameter to be a carbide-gas hose instead of an electric wire. Two smaller headlights had been mounted in the fire wall, along with a horn, at the right. (The two smaller lights may have been used as classification lights.) Another change was the removal of the foot boards over the front wheels, while the head end part of the roof had been filled-in with a curved down section, and some type of material closed the open spaces on each side of the windshield. The inspection car had no electric starter—it had to be hand-cranked. (See Pages 82, 83 and 123 of Volume IV in this series for other views of this car.)

DAVID AND FAYE WOLFORD COLLECTION



CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION -  
COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

**THE SILVER SWAN** mining property, located about three-quarters of a mile south of Rico, had tunneled into the base of Expectation Mountain at the edge of the Dolores River, near its confluence with Sulphur Creek. The summit of Expectation Mountain is on the skyline (at the left), west of the river valley. Upstream, toward Rico, the engine-coaling facility used by the RGS is visible, at the south end of the yard. The southern end of Rico is at the far right.

tempts to keep some of the mines in operation. (See *A Tenacious Woman... Elizabeth Eyre Pellet* in Volume VI.)

**1920** Many people left Rico for lack of employment. By the end of 1920, only about 150 people remained. Many houses were abandoned, and many were torn down to salvage their lumber. However, two general stores, a grocery store, a meat market and a pool hall kept their doors open—even though the ore-processing mills closed down.

**1921** Ore production was the lowest in 40 years, and the remaining residents in town barely survived. Rico had neither a resident doctor nor a clergyman, and the community made do with occasional visits for their needs. Dances and social events helped hold the town together, and they helped to keep the people's spirits up.

(Continued on Page 415)

## ACCIDENTS IN THE RICO AREA

By Robert W. Richardson

**WHEN THE RGS LINE** was built into Rico, the contractors were in a hurry, and they ignored the spring floods of the Dolores River. So, the yard, wye and wooden engine-house were constructed in the only flat place available, next to the river. Worse yet, both of the approach tracks to the tail of the wye crossed the river! If several sunny days came together during the spring, with no clouds to keep the temperature down, the snow melt would flood the Dolores Valley. Such a flood came in 1911, which just about wiped out the entire yard of the RGS, structures and wye. The railroad had no choice but to rebuild in the same area; however, the wye was moved to the opposite side of the mainline. The new wye made use of a slight draw, where the tail ended at the steep embankment below Rico's business district.

Luckily, the railroad's newly completed brick enginehouse, with three run-through tracks, escaped destruction, but the old enginehouse was damaged so badly that it was summarily torn down. Only the old lead

(Continued on Page 354)

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*Mile by Mile to...*

## **The Rico Division Point**

*The End of the First District  
and the Beginning of the  
Second District*

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### **The St. Louis Tunnel Period at Rico**

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*No. 9*

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## **THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT**

*By William A. Graves*

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*(Continued From Page 344 in Chapter 8)*

**1922** A young mining engineer by the name of Duane Kline visited Rico. He represented the St. Louis Smelting & Refining Company (the StLS&R) of St. Louis, Missouri. The StLS&R used sulfuric acid to process lead from their Missouri mines, and Kline's job in Rico was to evaluate the iron-pyrite deposits on Telescope Mountain. He found the pyrite deposits to be rich in iron and sulfur. Silver, lead and zinc values also were present, and the St. Louis Smelting & Refining Company negotiated a contract with the owner, the Rico Mining & Re-

duction Company, to develop the property. During the following year, development began on the St. Louis Tunnel. The portal was located about one mile north of Rico, on the east side of the Dolores River. A narrow-gauge electric tramway (i.e., a mine railroad) was to be built to "tram" (haul) the pyrite out of the tunnel.

**1923** Robert Pellet hired a few men and reopened the Princeton Mine on C.H.C. Hill. This was the beginning of Bob Pellet's efforts to save the old mining town from becoming just another deserted Colorado ghost town.

Bob Pellet did not have the capital to work any of the Rico mines on a large scale. However, after several rather unsuccessful attempts, Bob negotiated a contract with the International Smelting & Refining Company, a subsidiary of the great Anaconda Company. With this



CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION -  
COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

**THE SOUTHBOUND** passenger train of the RGS had reached Rico on a snowy Easter Sunday during 1922. The engineer was at the right, holding his oil can, while the fireman was standing next to him. The conductor had climbed up on the snow-covered locomotive, hanging onto a grab iron. Their trip must have been an unnerving experience, as the little engine had to buck through snowdrifts on Lizard Head Pass. Chances are, if the locomotive did not have a pilot plow, the train would have stalled somewhere on the northern side of the pass. The young man in front of the engine probably had been hired by the roadmaster to keep the yard's switches in operating condition during freezing weather, as well as to work at other tasks in the Rico yard, including the removal of snow from the locomotive before the train continued on its run. Notice the railing along the top of the Railway Post Office car, used by trainmen to hold onto while walking on the roof while going to and from the engine, since passage through the RPO car was not possible.

powerful backing, Bob formed the Falcon Mining Company and reopened and reworked the Falcon and Yellow Jacket mines on Nigger Baby Hill, under a lease-and-option arrangement with the Syndicate Mining & Milling Company.

**1924** Bob Pellet was elected as the mayor of Rico—for the first of three consecutive terms. He continued to expand his mining operations, and he formed a second mining firm, the Pell-Eyre Mining Company. Bob also secured options to work the Atlantic Cable and Shamrock mines, as well as the Pro Patria mill. Over \$350,000 worth of ore was shipped. Lead and zinc predominated.

*(Continued on Page 436)*



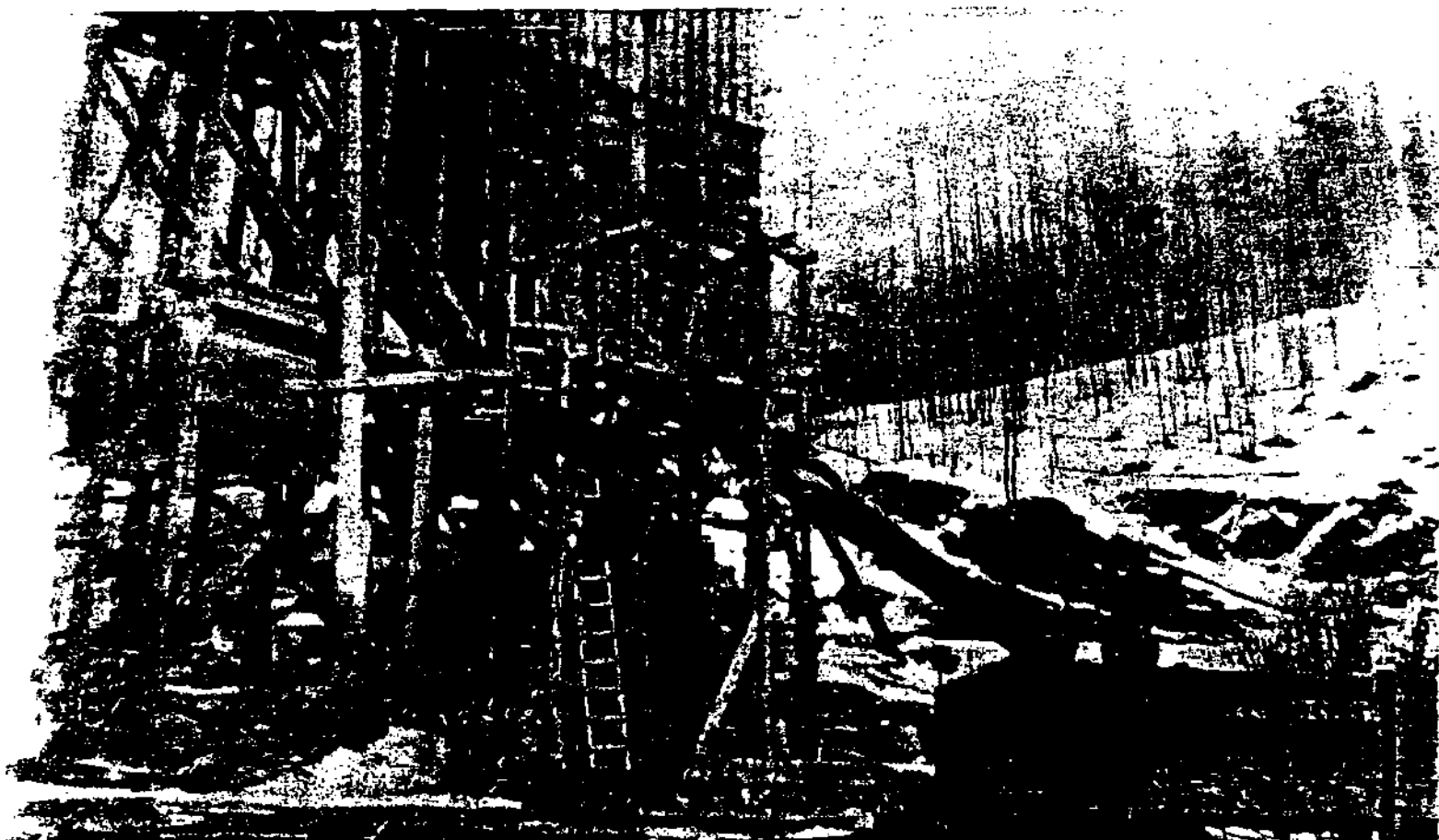


**1925** Pellet's mining operations continued to prosper, and his success attracted other smelting companies. The National Lead Company came to town and invested in mining operations that employed 125 men. The International Smelting Company built a 40-room bunkhouse on Glasgow Avenue for their men—originally named the Ricato Hotel. This building re-

cently was renovated, and it has been operating as the Rico Hotel (as of 1995).

**1926** Lengthy litigation between the Rico-Argentine Mining Company and the Syndicate Mining & Milling Company was resolved in the Rico-Argentine's favor. And the Rico-Argentine company acquired control of the old Pro Patria mill. The Western Colorado Power Company

*(Continued on Page 439)*



built a high-voltage electric line over Lizard Head Pass to serve the Rico area.

In its turbulent history of "boom-and-bust" cycles as a mining town, Rico was well into its third "boom cycle." Rico's population multiplied to over 1,000 residents; however, so many houses had been torn down during the slow days after World War I, that a severe housing shortage developed. Old businesses were revived, and new businesses opened their doors. A new dancehall was built, and social action got a lift. The "good old days" had returned in Rico.

**1927** Prosperity continued in the Rico area. The average wage for miners rose to \$6.00 per day, an increase of \$2.00 from 1923. Bob Pellet's payroll increased to 300 workers. The old Pro Patria mill, at the foot of Mantz Avenue, was totally rebuilt as a modern selective-flotation mill, with a capacity of 250 tons per day. Ore worth almost \$1.5 million was produced in the district during the year.

All of this success was achieved in spite of a bad flood on June 28. The Do-

lores River and Silver Creek both ran wild, and the town and the RGS suffered heavy damage, particularly to bridges. A mile of track on the RGS was washed out, and no trains made it in or out Rico for about three weeks.

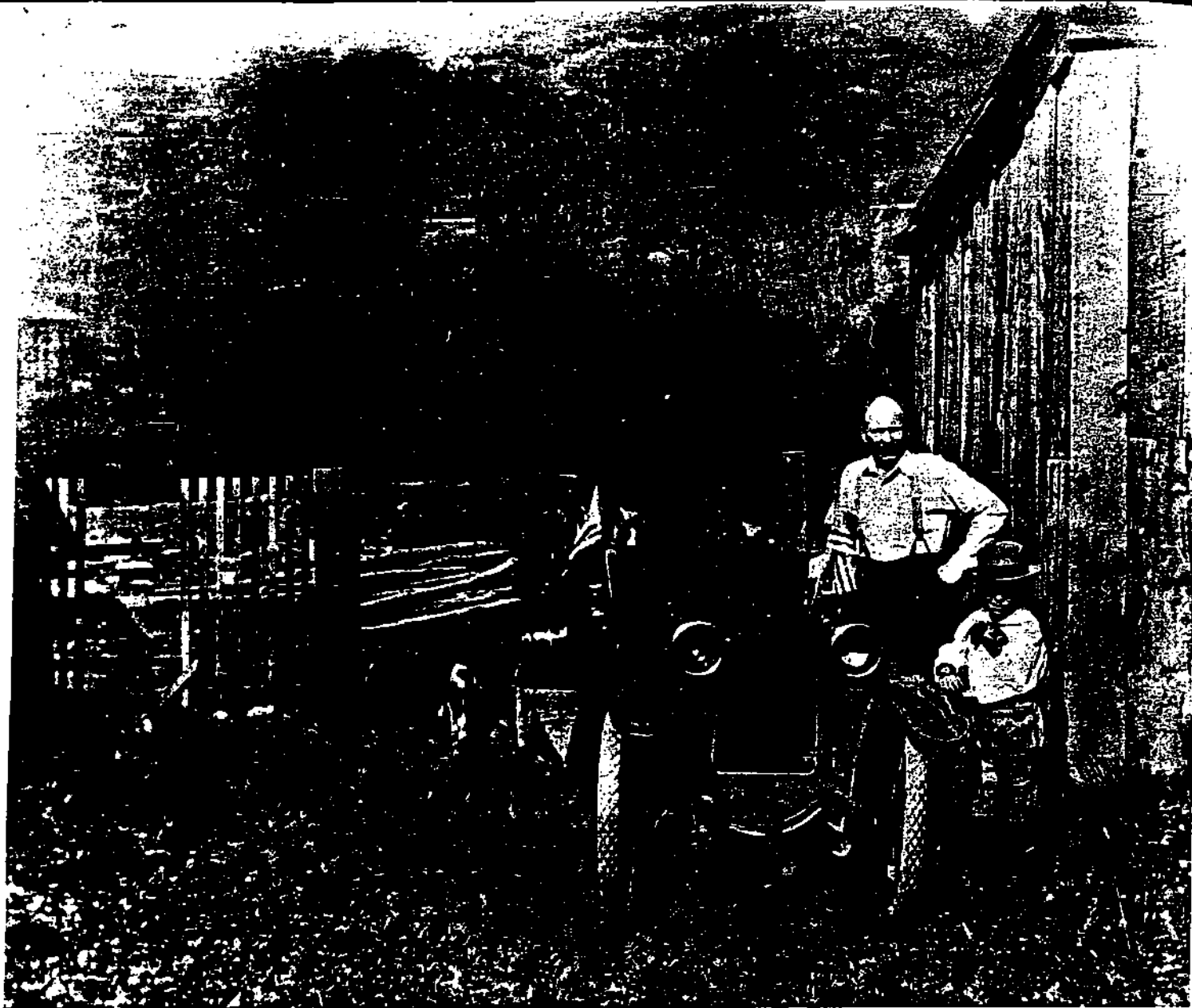
**1928** Eleven active mines produced almost \$1.5 million in ore, mostly lead and zinc, as prosperity continued in the Rico area. The town's population continued to increase, and about 20 new houses were constructed.

*(Continued on Page 482)*

FROM "THE RICO ITEM," FEBRUARY 1932 -  
COURTESY WENDE P. STUART

**NINE MEN** started from town Wednesday morning, on foot for Coke Ovens to assist in bringing the two engines and plow in to Rico after which the Railroad Company will open the line between here and Vance Junction with the rotary.

**THE NIGGER BABY SLIDE** was cleared Friday of last week. The county machinery, with five men, and Mr. Kline of the St. Louis S. & R. Co. donating three men, shoveled out 120 feet of snow four feet deep. This again enables the men to drive their cars to work at the tunnel.



CHARLES J. LEE PHOTO - DAVID C. BUTLER COLLECTION

**THIS SMALL AUTOMOBILE** must have been built prior to the 1920's. The car had carbide-gas headlights and oil cowl lamps, and it was not equipped with a self-starter—as the hand crank looks well used. The axle length was unusually short, and the wheels would not have fit into the ruts of the dirt roads of this era! Down the hill (at the left) is a glimpse of the school and farther down is the Atlantic Cable tunnel.

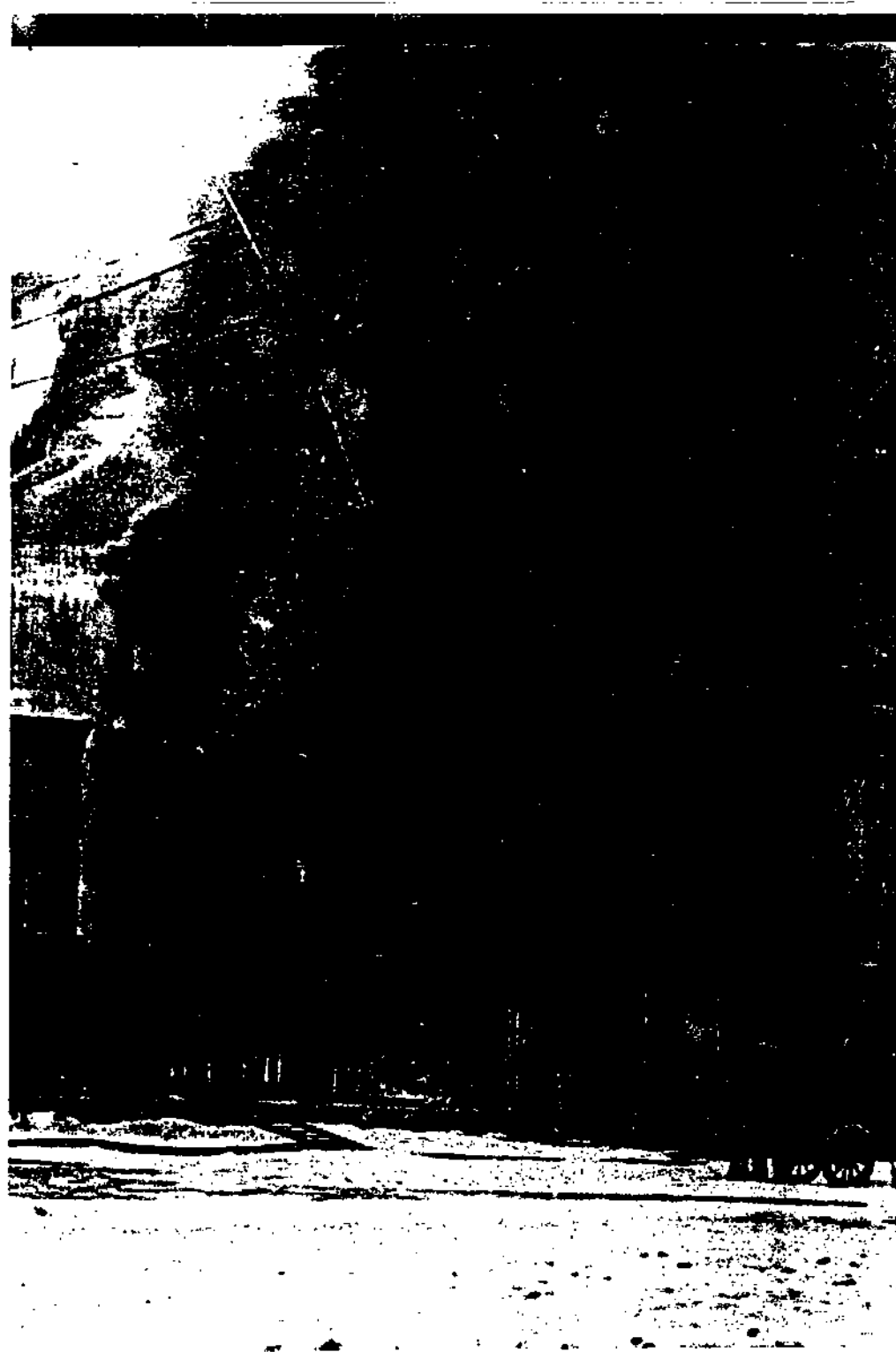
**THIS PHOTOGRAPH** was taken from a higher elevation on Expectation Mountain and illustrates how Rico was built on the sedimentary area below the nearby mountains (on a terrace above the river). Blackhawk Mountain, at the left, is beyond Dolores Mountain, at the right. From this perspective, the task prospectors had in searching for mineral wealth becomes apparent. Mining dumps are visible on Dolores Mountain. Rico had this appearance ca. 1927, and by this time, the Pro Patria mill was the town's largest structure, with numerous additions having been completed.

CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION  
- COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

**1929** The good times ended in Rico during 1929. The beginning of the infamous Great Depression caused a drop in metal prices, and most of the mines closed down or greatly cut back their production. The mainline of the RGS was blockaded by the Ames mud slide for most of the year. (See the story about the Ames mud slide in Volume III of this series.) Loss of income resulting from the blockade, as well as from reduced ore shipments forced the RGS into its second bankruptcy.

**1930** The Great Depression got worse, and there was little demand for metals, as the Nation's factories shut down. During a two-year period, the annual value of ore produced in the Pioneer Mining District

*(Continued on Page 484)*



CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION -  
COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

**THE KOSTER MARKET** was destroyed as the result of a fire that swept through the building in 1931. Fortunately, the firemen were able to subdue the flames and saved the building next door (which has the bay window that overhangs the sidewalk). Smoke and fire had engulfed the upper floor and roof when this picture was taken, sometime after the fire had started at the back of the building.

**AS FIREMEN** brought the blaze under control, smoke and steam poured out of the ruins. The roof had collapsed, but the metal stamped-brick siding helped to prevent the fire from spreading to the building next door. Probably because the fire happened during the day, the blaze was spotted early enough to get it under control. After dark, a fire can burn for a longer period, making it harder to control—and the flames can leap to the next buildings, sometimes leveling an entire block.

CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION -  
COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

dropped from about \$1,500,000 to a mere \$200,000. Bob Pellet kept a small force of about 40 miners working, to avoid laying them off, even though he had to make up losses with his own money to pay them. Many residents left town, but others could not even afford to leave.

**1931** Bob Pellet's losses continued to mount, and he finally was forced to close down his Rico operations, including the Pro Patria mill. Only \$2,000 worth of ore was produced in the district during 1931.

The RGS began a cost-reduction program by building and placing in operation the "Galloping Goose" railbuses, Nos. 1, 2 and 3, which replaced more costly steam-powered passenger trains.

**1932** Rico's economy hit bottom in 1932. For the first time in over 50 years, no ore was produced during the year. At the same time, the town's population fell from about 2,500 to about 300 in 1932.

A severe snowstorm, which began on February 8, 1932, isolated Rico from



CHARLES MILLER ENGEL COLLECTION -  
COURTESY RACHEL A. HARDWICK

**ON THE NEXT DAY**, after the disastrous fire at the Koster Market, the windows were boarded up to protect the remaining salvageable contents. The building was a total loss, and it was subsequently torn down.

both north and south. A relief train spent five days clearing the line from Durango to Mancos, and another four days opening the track to Dolores and Rico. The snow-clearing train from the north had even less success. After fighting the snow on the south side of Lizard Head Pass for days, the crew had to give up. The plow-flanger was left at Burns (2.6 miles north of Rico), two engines were abandoned at Coke Ovens, and a Galloping Goose was required to stay at Lizard Head. The snow blockade lasted for over three months, and the line north of Rico was not reopened until May 16.

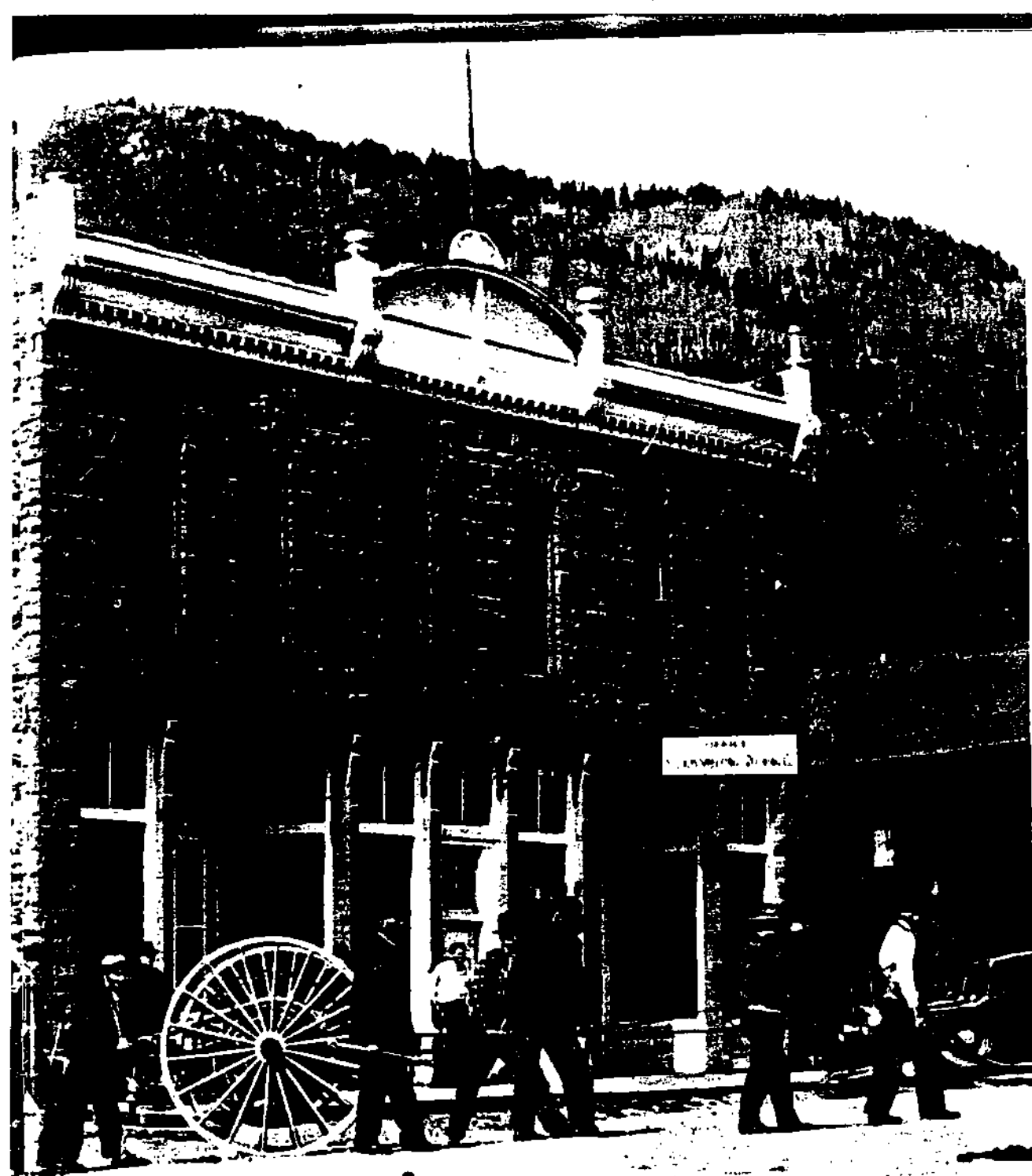
**1933** Rico had been the only incorporated town in Dolores County since its founding in 1879. However, a small, but growing, settlement named Dove Creek—located near the west end of the county—began to challenge Rico in the 1930's. Unlike Rico, Dove Creek had a more stable economy, based on agriculture. In 1930, Dove Creek's population was only 120 people, and the town was not incorporated until 1939; however, in 1933, Dove Creek succeeded in "stealing" the county newspaper from Rico. For the first time in over 50 years, Rico was without its own newspaper.



ORVAL L. JAHNKE COLLECTION

**THE RICO FIRE DEPARTMENT** – Hose Team No. 1 – proudly posed for action with their hook-and-ladder wagon and hose cart. This view probably was taken during a practice fire drill, which took place during the early 1930's. Next door, a signboard was hanging from the wall of the stone Burley Block structure, which read: "Office – St. Louis Smelting & Refining Co." The Burley Block still stands today (1996).

**1934** Mining was still very slow in the Rico area, but there was some renewed interest in gold mining, as a result of an increase in gold prices. Since 1850, the price of gold had been controlled by the Federal government at \$20.67 per ounce. To help the Nation recover from its disastrous economic depression, the gov-



ernment allowed the price of gold to increase to \$35.00 per ounce over a three-year period, beginning in 1933. A few of the mines in the district reopened in 1934, and they were worked mostly for gold and silver. However, the St. Louis Smelting & Refining Company shut

down operations at the St. Louis Tunnel.  
1935 Silver prices rose; however, ore production in the Rico area increased very little.

1936 The Obendorfer General Store closed down, after almost 50 years of family operation.



BILL PLUNKETT COLLECTION

SOMETIME DURING 1939 an unknown photographer shot this picture of Galloping Goose No. 4. She was running as Train 371 (southbound) and had stopped at the Rico depot. This three-truck vehicle was constructed from a 1926 Pierce Arrow limousine. These second-hand Pierce Arrow vehicles came from a company in Colorado Springs that ran tours up Pikes Peak. Goose No. 4 had been put together from a Pierce Arrow body during the first half of 1933, using a Model "33,"

powered with a 33-horsepower Pierce Arrow motor—with a built-up freight-mail compartment at the rear of the limousine body. This is the way No. 4 looked two years before the U.S. entered World War II. Notice the split lettering for "RIO," which occurred when the freight doors were moved to the center of the compartment. During the summer months, the Geese often ran with their hood side panels raised (resting on the fenders), to provide additional cooling for the motors.

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT *A Chronology of Events*

By William A. Graves

1937 - 1950

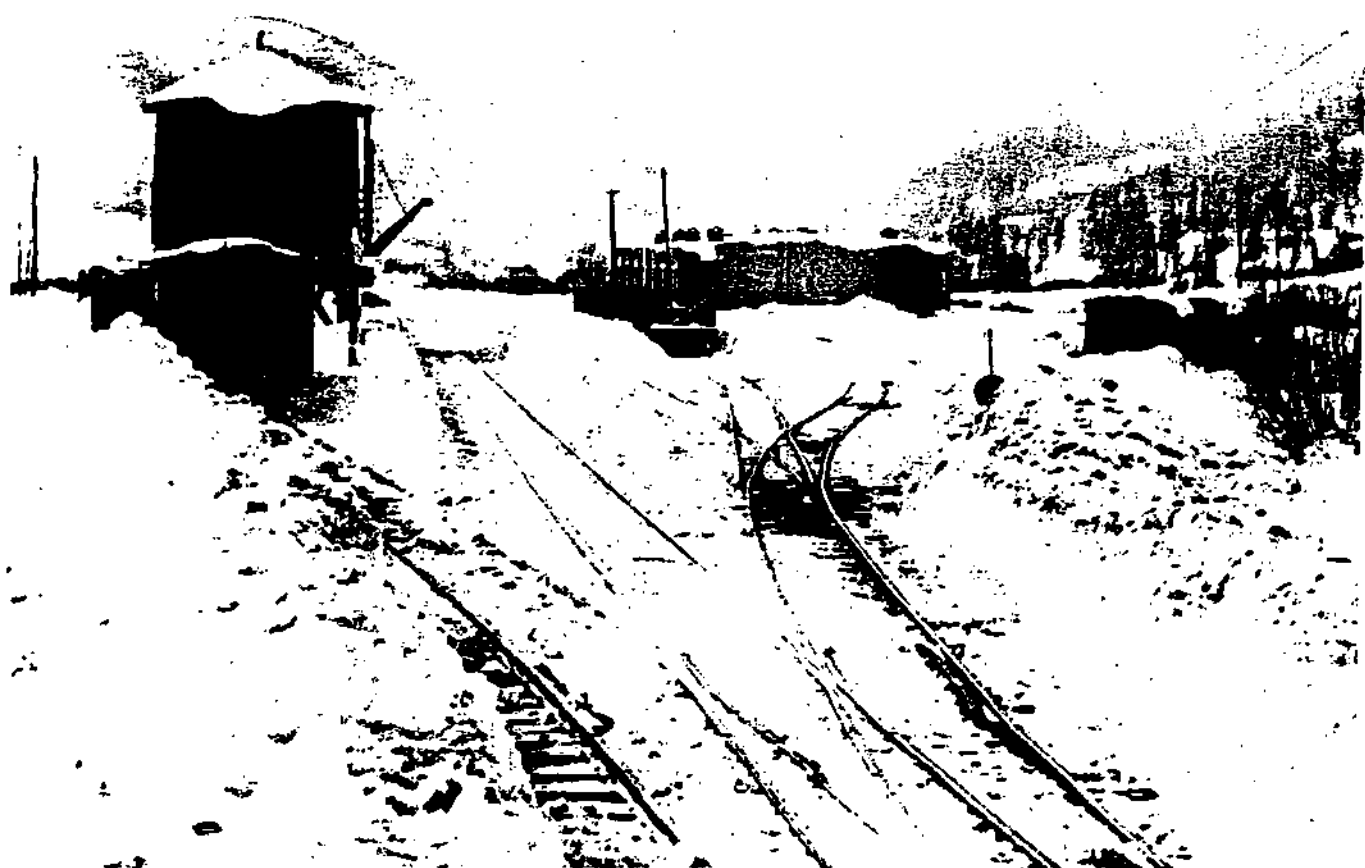
***THIS CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS***  
*begins the year after it ended in Volume V of this continuing series...*

1937 The Rico-Argentine company was re-organized, with J. A. Hogle of Salt Lake City achieving financial control. C. G. Van Winkle was appointed as manager, and the company began operation at the Blaine Tunnel, on Silver Creek. Robert

Pellet developed heart trouble, which greatly restricted his day-to-day management of his mining property.

1938 The Rico-Argentine Mining Company began a very large expansion program, probably anticipating a high worldwide demand for metals, as many nations prepared for war. Over a period of several years, they increased their holdings in the Rico area, from about 240 acres to 3,000 acres, and they also acquired the mining rights to over 80 percent of the mines in the Rico district. The company also built a large multi-level flotation mill, with a capacity for producing 135 tons of ore per day. This new mill was about two miles up Silver Creek, and this building and several smaller structures, near the site, are still standing; however, they are on private property.





DIANE V. DAVIS COLLECTION

**A WINTER STORM** had blown across Rico, ca. 1939, dumping approximately two feet of snow. The RGS station grounds had already been plowed open, probably with the use of Plow-Flanger 02. Notice that hand work had been done with shovels and picks at some of the flangeways.

**1939** Because of increasingly poor health, Robert Pellet had to phase out his mining contract with the International Smelting Company.

**1940** With many countries at war, or preparing for war, the world's demand for metals took a sharp increase. Ore production skyrocketed at Rico, and the town was in its fourth "boom cycle." This big increase of activity at the mines did not change the appearance of the town very much. New mining methods, as well as new equipment, had made mining so much more efficient that a large labor force was not needed. Rico's mines employed 200 to 250 men, and the official 1940 census reported that the town's population was 388 people.

(Continued on Page 141)

*From the Annals of the RGS...*

## THE YEAR OF 1940 IN REVIEW

*Based on the Receiver's Annual Report  
Submitted to the Interstate Commerce  
Commission's Bureau of Statistics*

**By Gabe Bradford**

**THE FLAMES OF WAR** were beginning to spread across the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Many people were coming to the realization that war was inevitable, and the United States would be right in the middle of it before long. The demand for production of war-related items and raw materials associated with these items had begun in earnest. Once again in the Colorado Rockies, the zinc, tin, vanadium, coal, coke, molybdenum and other more exotic minerals needed to win the war were in demand. With increased demand came increases in the prices offered for these minerals that translated into greater production and welcome employment.



MORRIS W. ABBOTT PHOTO - WILLIAM R. JONES COLLECTION

**DURING AUGUST** of 1942 the north end of the Rico yard was photographed by Morris W. Abbott, a railfan from the East. The RGS water tank was unobstructed from this angle (at this particular time). A string of high-side gondolas had been left on the No. 2 passing siding at

Rico, west of the depot. This was officially named Track No. 72, 960 feet long. The former Bridge & Building Department cars had become lineside structures years ago. In view at the left, next to the old RPO car body in use by the yardmaster. The freight room of the depot is at the far right.

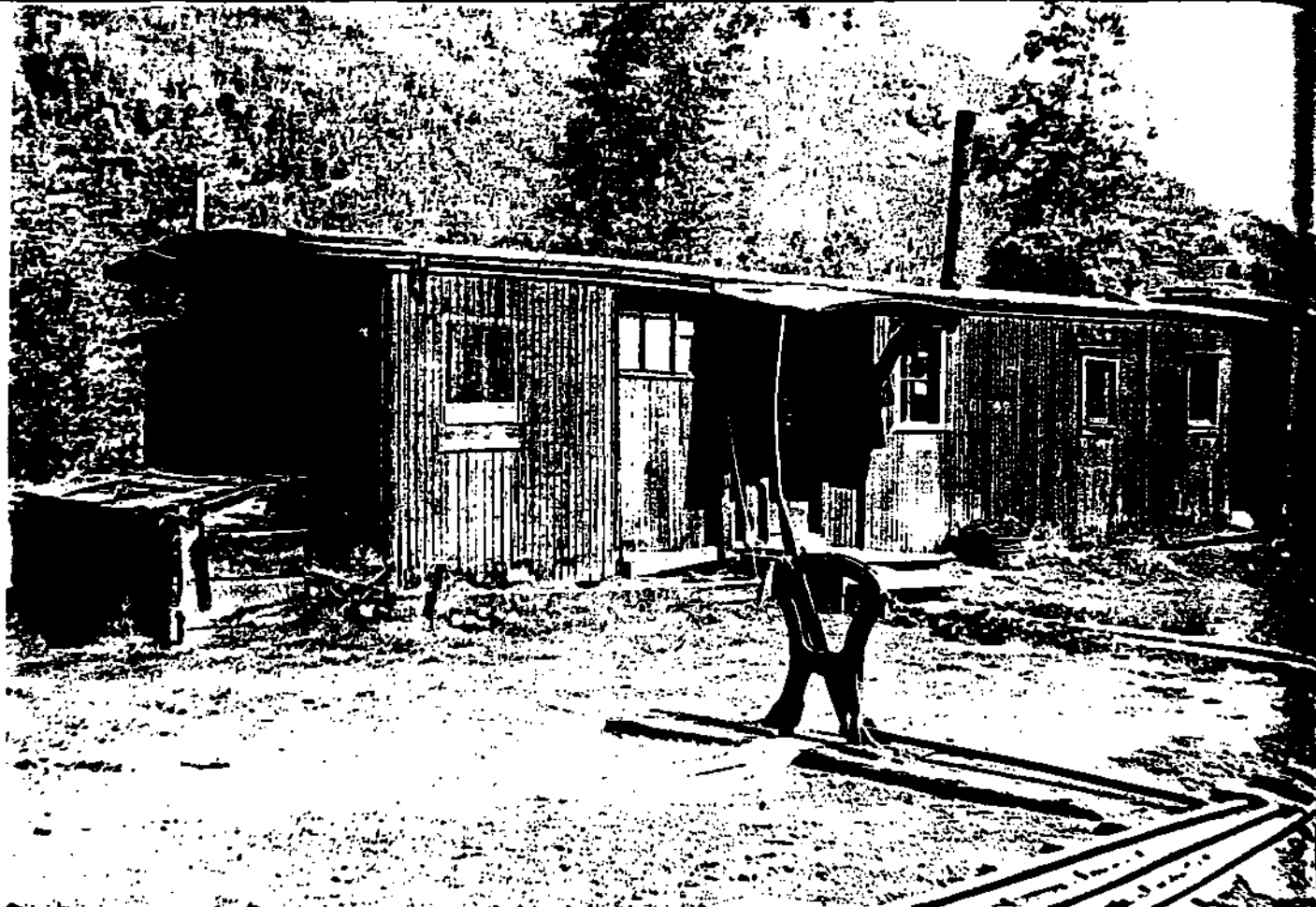
**1941** The Rico-Argentine company acquired the International Smelting Company's properties, which included the Atlantic Cable and Shamrock mines, as well as the Mantz Avenue mill site. Ore production continued to increase in 1941.

**1942** The United States was still recovering from the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and the entire Nation was frantically gearing-up for all-out war. The government took over directing the operations of the railroads and prioritized them by their contribution to the war effort. However, the RGS was not considered essential, and legal proceedings for dismantling the line were scheduled. Only the intense-and-determined political efforts by Elizabeth Pellet kept the RGS

operating during World War II.

The Rico-Argentine company continued to expand its holdings, and the firm bought the Pellet's holdings on Newman Hill, which included the old Pro Patria and Enterprise mines. They also bought the St. Louis Tunnel property from the National Lead Company, a company that had formerly been known as the St. Louis Smelting & Refining Company when it came to Rico in 1922. Mr. Kline, a long-time manager for the StLS&R, and his wife, left Rico at this time. The Rico-Argentine also bought most of the town property and ran most of the services. Almost everyone in town was on the Rico-Argentine's payroll.

**1943-1948** These were the all-time top mining years at Rico. The mines in the



STANLEY SCHWEDLER COLLECTION -  
COURTESY OF CORONADO SCALE MODELS

**THE YARDMASTER'S OFFICE** still looked as though it was in reasonably good shape during the 1940's. Notice that the old car's number, 01707, was still visible through the paint. You can also see the "DEFENSE SUPPLIES CORPORATION - OWNER & LESSOR" notice just below the window (boarded up) at the left side of the car body.



MORRIS W. ABBOTT PHOTO - WILLIAM R. JONES COLLECTION

**RGS CABOOSE No. 0404** was involved in an accident at Rico prior to November of 1943, when a car of ore crashed into the end of the caboose. The boxcar being switched had bad-order brakes and should not have been in service. This was the result of that error in judgment. The wreck damaged both ends of No. 0404, and the hack had to be hauled to Ridgway on a flatcar for repair, where it was resting when this picture was taken. Caboose 0404 is now on display at the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden.

Rico district, headed by the Rico-Argentine, produced more than \$1-million worth of metals every year, and over \$9-million worth during this six-year period. Over half of the value was in zinc, a key wartime metal. Because of the manpower shortage during World War II, many Navajo miners from the Four Corners area—where the borders of Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico come together—were employed by the Rico-Argentine. And these men were reported to be very good workers. The Navajos were an easily recognized minority, and they tended to keep to themselves, away from the town's activities. Although there was a non-discrimination policy, the Navajos socialized very little with other town residents. Rico had the usual social organizations, typical of small, isolated towns of that time, such as the Moose, Odd Fellows and Masonic lodges, the Rico Volunteer Fire Department, the La-



track in the foreground was for the weighing scale, while the track at the far left was the south end of the house track. It had loaded boxcars spotted on it, ready to be picked up. The old harp switchstand, at the right, was set in the derail position, protecting the main track from runaways.

dies Aid Society and the Busy Bees Sewing Club.

Rico did not operate as a traditional company town, but the Rico-Argentine Mining Company owned most of the town. Most of the residents were on the company's payroll, and most of the town's officers were Rico-Argentine employees, as well. The company did work around the town, and it treated the town and company employees somewhat as a benevolent parent. For example, the grocery store and the automobile garage were private businesses, but the Rico-Argentine guaranteed payment of their employee's accounts. The company also operated a movie theater on a non-profit basis, and it negotiated with a medical doctor from Telluride or Dolores to visit Rico weekly to care for their employee's needs. Rico's population ranged from 400 to 600 people. C. T. Van Winkle, the president of the Rico-Argentine, retired at the end of this period, in 1948.

The Pro Patria mill was completely shut down in 1948.

1944 Dove Creek was a rapidly growing town, which offered a more-accessible location than Rico. By 1944, its population had become larger than Rico's, and in a general county-wide election, the voters chose to move the Dolores County seat to Dove Creek, where it remains today. (It should be noted that the town of Dolores is in Montezuma County—not in Dolores County.)

1949 The wartime demand for metals was over by 1949, and the catch-up production of all kinds of goods for peacetime use was over. Ore production in the Rico area was reduced by more than half, and 150 men were laid off at the Rico-Argentine. Sherman B. Hinckley, the new president of the Rico-Argentine company, closed down mining operations, including the Silver Creek mill, in May of 1949. Regrettably, Robert Pellet, who had kept the Rico mines active during the 1930's, was injured in an automobile accident on November 10, 1949. Betty was at the wheel because of her husband's heart trouble and failing health, and their car skidded on an icy section of Highway 145 on Montelores Hill, about six miles south of Rico. Betty was not badly hurt

ROBERT W. RICHARDSON PHOTOS -  
DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, WESTERN HISTORY DEPARTMENT

**ROBERT W. RICHARDSON** arrived at Durango aboard the D&RGW's narrow-gauge named train, the "San Juan," for a ride over the RGS line. This was on October 10, 1945, and Bob had just been discharged from service in the U.S. Army, near the end of World War II. He had decided to "take in" the narrow-gauge lines out in Colorado. On October 11, Bob rode in the mail truck to the little farm-ranch town of Dolores. After arriving in this sleepy community, he found nothing to do except wait for a doubleheaded Durango-to-Dolores freight train, which did not arrive in Dolores until after dark. So, Bob was unable to shoot any photographs of this run. Bob stayed overnight in Dolores, and on October 12 he rode the northbound Galloping Goose, leaving Dolores at 7:30 a.m. bound for Rico. There, he shot this picture of the "train" he had been riding on, Goose No. 3, running as Train 372. L-C-L freight was either being loaded out of, or into, the silver railbus at the Rico depot. The Chevrolet truck of ca. 1938 vintage was lettered "Red Glow Coal," and it was parked between the Goose and freight dock of the depot.

and was able to scramble back up to the road, but Bob was trapped in the wreckage. After some time, he was rescued and taken to the hospital at Cortez. Following a five-day stay, he was able to return to his home in Rico.

1950 One of the dates on Robert Pellet's tombstone in Rico is correct; however,





**BEFORE PULLING OUT** of Rico on October 12, 1945, Jimmy Cooper poured water into the radiator of RGS Galloping Goose No. 3. Running as northbound Train 372, the railbus would soon be tackling the 3.0-percent grade to Lizard Head Pass. Goose No. 3 departed from Rico at 10:22 a.m. with four paying passengers. While waiting at Lizard Head Pass for the freight train to arrive, it began to snow very hard, and Bob was unable to take any pictures, as the big flakes fell thick and fast. Soon the ground was completely covered, and Bob became concerned about being afoot in this remote area, in the middle of a snowstorm. However, the northbound freight train finally arrived, and Bob boarded the caboose for a

ride down to Vance Junction to await the arrival of the daily southbound Goose, Train 371. He had a rather long wait, as the railbus scheduled out of Ridgway southbound had mechanical trouble, and when Goose No. 3 arrived in Ridgway, she was serviced and sent back southward. Bob boarded the Goose when she arrived at Vance Junction hours behind schedule, with Motorman Henry Wolford at the controls. He and Bob had a nice chat as the little railbus rocked and rolled through the snow-covered mountains on the run down-grade to Rico. Here, Bob stepped down from No. 3 to spend the night in a hotel, while Henry Wolford herded the Goose on to Dolores, so she would be ready for her northbound run on October 13.

the other one is not. Bob Pellet was born in Watkins Glen, New York, on December 2, 1872, but he did not die in 1949, as shown on the tombstone. He was very much alive at that time; however, he experienced another more serious car accident on January 17, 1950. The accident occurred at an icy spot on U.S. Highway 160, about four miles west of Durango.

The car that Betty was driving collided with a truck loaded with coal. Both Betty and Bob were seriously injured. She suffered broken ribs, and he went into severe shock. Both of them required lengthy stays in Durango's Mercy Hospital. On March 17, the front page of The Dolores Star newspaper reported that

*(Continued on Page 164)*



RICHARD H. KINDIG PHOTO

**A BEAUTIFUL BROADSIDE** view of Engine 20 was taken before her departure for Dolores on May 30, 1947. This run was made for a Rocky Mountain Railroad Club special, and 4-6-0 No. 20 had been freshly painted and lettered for this excursion. (The boiler was painted dark green, while the smokebox was graphite silver, and the lettering was painted in white. At the same time, the trim was neatly done in silver.) Unfortunately, this attractive Ten-wheeler developed leaky flues as she was climbing the grade between Ridgway and Dallas Divide. So, when the club's excursionists boarded the train the following morning, they found leased Denver & Rio Grande Western 2-8-0 No. 319 in charge of their return trip to Ridgway.

BILL PLUNKETT COLLECTION

**THE ENGINEER'S SIDE** of D&RGW No. 319 was photographed while her tender was being filled from Rico's water tank on the morning of May 31, 1947. Apparently, engines had dumped their ashes here, piled up to the left of No. 319. This was the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club's northbound special, en route from Dolores. The train had departed from Ridgway on the previous morning, with RGS No. 20 as the motive power.

**ON THE MORNING** of May 31, 1947, the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club excursion train left Dolores, with leased D&RGW engine No. 319 on the point. Here, No. 319, an ex-Florence & Cripple Creek 2-8-0, had just "tanked-up" at the Rico water tank, and was about to depart for Ridgway.

RICHARD H. KINDIG PHOTO - ELMORE FREDERICK COLLECTION

Robert Pellet died on March 12, 1950, at a Denver hospital.

With Bob's death, Rico lost one of its strongest supporters—a man who did everything he could to maintain a high level of employment for mining operations and the RGS railroad. Following his death, Betty Pellet lived another 26 years as a

widow—an extremely active widow who worked hard to improve her community.

The Rico-Argentine mining enterprise started operating again on a small scale, with about 50 men. However, the town's population was down to 212 people. The Pro Patria mill may have operated for a short time.

## THE STORY OF RICO AND THE PIONEER MINING DISTRICT

### *A Chronology of Events*

By William A. Graves

— 1951 —

**THIS CHRONOLOGY** about Rico  
*continues from 1950...*

**1951** Car-loadings on the RGS were down to one-third of their 1948 levels. Both the financial condition and the physical condition of the RGS were desperately poor. When the RGS sent notices of increases in freight rates to its shippers, the Telluride Mines and the Rico-Argentine began to ship their ore-concentrates by highway trucks. This was a fatal blow for the RGS. These two mines were the biggest customers, and the RGS management stated that the two mining companies had generated two-thirds of the RGS revenue in 1950. Railroad operations were cut back even further than before. And the last northbound freight train departed from Rico on November 26, 1951, while the last southbound freight train departed from Rico three days later. The Federal court gave the railroad permission to suspend operations on the entire line on December 17, 1951.

The Rico-Argentine Mining Company bought the freight yards and buildings of the RGS at Rico. Some of the rail was salvaged and was used underground at the St. Louis, Argentine and Mountain Springs mines, and above ground at the acid-processing plant.

# RIO GRANDE SOUTHERN



DONALD DUKE PHOTO - PUBLISHER OF GOLDEN WEST BOOKS

**GALLOPING GOOSE No. 4** was being loaded with L-C-L (less-than-carload lot) freight and express shipments at the Rico depot, during the winter of 1948. No. 4 was the first Goose to receive a Wayne schoolbus body—in 1946—having already received a rebuilt (war-surplus) GMC truck motor during 1946. Donald Duke reported the following: "Ernie Peyton and I took the train from Colorado Springs during the spring recess [from college] and arrived in Alamosa in the morn-



**THE STORY OF RICO AND THE  
PIONEER MINING DISTRICT**  
*A Chronology of Events*  
By William A. Graves

1951 - 1997



*No. 6*

*The Chronology of Events Continues...*

**1951-1956** As a result of the Korean hostilities, the early 1950's saw a sharp increase in the demand for metals. Starting in 1951, Dolores County enjoyed six years of booming prosperity. Between \$1-million and \$2-million worth of ore was produced every year. As the "Ore-Production Table" shows (on Page 227), the value of the ore mined during the 1950's was greater than that of the 1890's boom, and second only to that of the 1940's. In addition to ore production in the 1950's, another boom was taking place in southwestern Colorado. A young uranium industry was growing rapidly, and it needed large quantities of sulfuric acid. The Rico-Argentine mine was very capable of supplying this acid at a competitive price.

DR. A. G. CHIONE PHOTO

**THE FIRST SWITCH** leading into the south end of the Rico station grounds appears in this view, taken during the spring of 1952, after the RGS had been abandoned. This turnout served the scale track and house track, which ran along the east side of the depot—and it had been used for loading ore into boxcars. With the Dolores River so close to the main track and yard, it is a wonder that there were not more washouts caused by high water during spring runoffs.

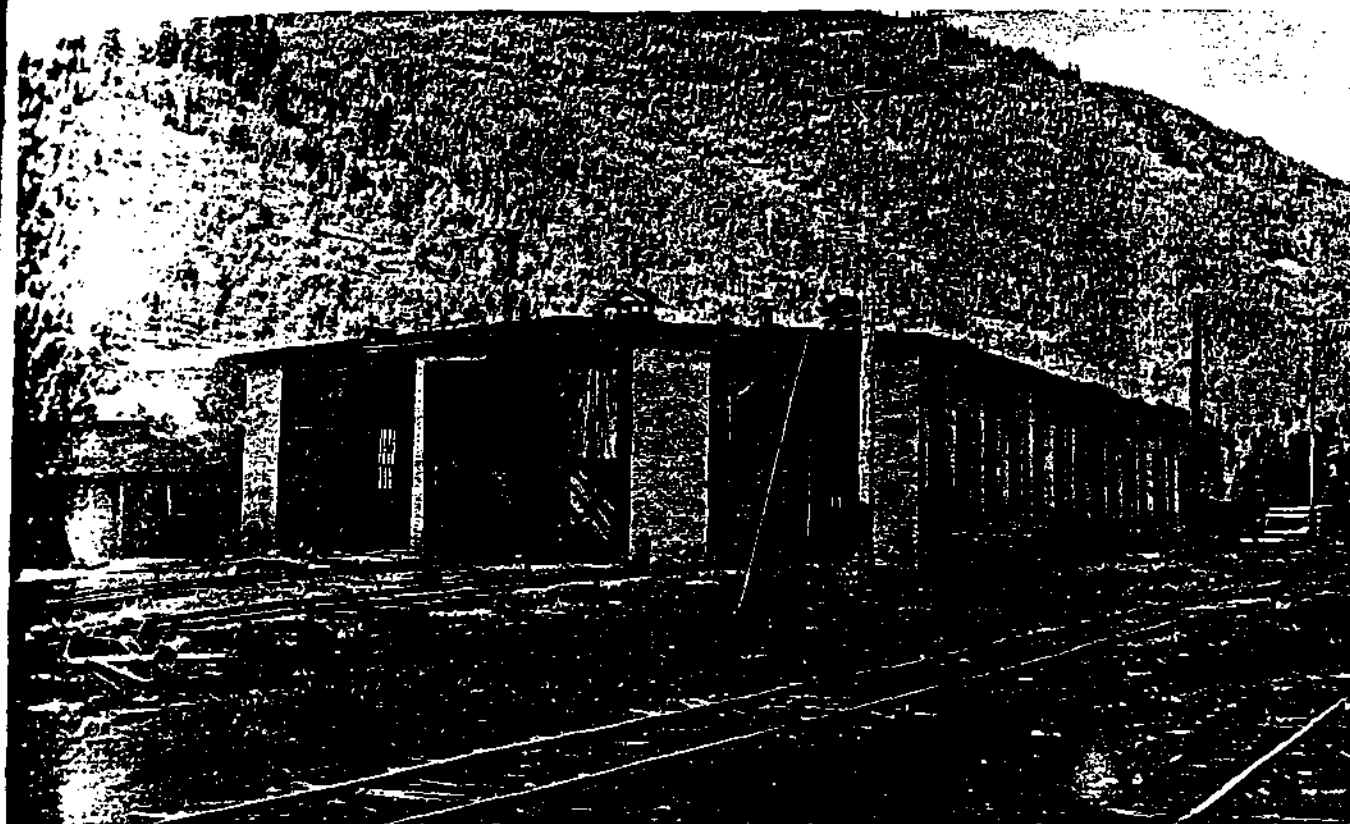
JR. A. G. CHIONE PHOTO

**DURING THE SPRING** of 1952, Dr. A. G. Chione, took a trip over what had been the narrow-gauge RGS line, taking photographs of railroad buildings before the scrappers arrived to destroy everything. This unobstructed view of the Rico station grounds was taken as he looked toward the north. Only one lead track from the south connected with the one of the three tracks inside the enginehouse. The old harp switchstand controlled the derail at the left, which protected the siding below from runaways. The old wooden racks at the right once stored bridge timbers—up off the ground—for use by the Bridge & Building Department for trestle repair. The track running beside the timber-storage racks was once used for Rico's track scale.

The St. Louis Tunnel was reopened to produce pyrite, about half iron and half sulphur. This tunnel was on C.H.C. Hill, a location near the base of Telescope Mountain. This pyrite was mined at a site known as the Mountain Springs mine, and it was trucked a short distance to an acid-processing plant. This plant was designed by the Monsanto Chemical Company, and it was constructed by the Leonard Company of Chicago in 1954. The cost of the plant was \$1.5 million. It was located near the portal of the St. Louis Tunnel, and it usually operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Daily production was about 125 tons, and the acid sold for about \$20 per ton. The Union Carbide Company and the Vanadium Company of America became good customers. The acid was trucked to Durango, Grand Junction and other mill sites in southwestern Colorado.

This new prosperity increased the town's population to about 400 people, and it created another housing shortage. The Rico-Argentine operation developed a trailer park and provided some additional housing for employees. A new elementary school building was constructed in 1953.





VAUGHAN JONES PHOTO - RICHARD A. RONZIO COLLECTION

**RICO'S ENGINEHOUSE** originally was used as a facility with three tracks that ran through the building and connected with the main tracks at each end of the yard. This enginehouse was built so it was long enough to hold two locomotives

on each of the three run-through tracks. This picture was taken after the Rio Grande Southern had been abandoned, and it shows the window and door arrangements on the east wall of the wooden sandhouse.

Older students went to school in Dolores. Commercial businesses in Rico consisted of a large general store, two cafes and bars, a hotel, a movie theater, a repair garage, some Colorado State Highway Department facilities, a mining office, which also accommodated the town's telephone service, and several other services.

1958 The acid plant continued to produce well, but the Silver Creek mill was closed, and for the first year since 1932, the Pioneer Mining District failed to ship any ore.

1959 O. L. Jahnke was appointed as the manager of the Rico-Argentine operation at Rico, a position held for many years.

1959-1963 The Rico-Argentine bounced back, and it produced enough ore to run the Silver Creek mill at 80- to 85-percent

capacity most of the time. However, the uranium industry began to collapse toward the end of this period, and sulfuric-acid production was cut back.

Construction began on an improved hard-surface road, Colorado Highway 145, which goes through Rico on the town's main street, Glasgow Avenue. Much of this improved highway was relocated on the old RGS railroad grade.

1964 The Rico-Argentine's sulfuric-acid plant was put on standby in October of 1964, and the plant was completely closed three years later.

1965 An old mine, the Payroll Mine, was reopened by the Mountain States Mining Company, and it was active for about two years.

1967 The upgrading of Highway 145 was

(Continued on Page 226)



TWO VIEWS: DR. A. G. CHIONE PHOTOS -  
FORT LEWIS COLLEGE, CENTER OF SOUTHWEST STUDIES

**DR. A. G. CHIONE** took two pictures of the Rico yard in 1952—reproduced on this and the following page—wherein the two picture frames together produce this broad sweep of the yard. The scene was north of the Rico depot and enginehouse. At the far left, the depot, a tool shed, section-car shed and water tank appear to the east

of the main track. These two pictures clearly show the alignment of the mainline and yard tracks, as well as the leads and spur tracks on the north side of the enginehouse. A coal shed was still positioned beside the spur track, at the far right. The old harp-type switchstand aligned the rails for access to the enginehouse service area.

completed, and Rico finally had an asphalted, paved highway.

**1969–1975** A mine near Rico, called the Silver Clad Mine, was worked between 1969 and 1975. Ore from the Silver Clad was trucked to the Silver Bell mill at Ophir Loop for processing. (See Page 467 of Volume III in this series for more details.)

**1977** The Rico-Argentine company suspended all mining operations during the early part of 1977. The mining that had been the reason for the town's creation and existence came to an end after 100 years of "boom-and-bust" cycles.

**1980** By this time, Rico was almost deserted. The 1980 census showed a population of only 76 people in the old mining town.

**1997** As this book is being published, Rico is being "discovered" again. Enough

tourists visit Rico each year to help support a bar and cafe, a general store (with gasoline pumps for automobiles), a hotel and a motel. The declining population of the 1980's has reversed itself, and the town has grown back to about 125 people. This historic town, with its Old West charm, situated in the beautiful Dolores River Valley, is becoming known as a very desirable place to live (and visit), without many of society's urban problems. Life is a little slower in Rico, and the residents seem to have adjusted their pace to the natural rhythm of their surroundings.

As a footnote, it has been reported that **THE NEW YORK TIMES** published a story in August of 1996, stating that "investors" had bought most of Rico "...for development." Supposedly, the investors spent \$4 million for their purchases.